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## Huskers By Josh





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## Memorable Finish

*Clutch drive, kick save Huskers  
in thriller against upset-minded Buffs*



**Brian Hill**

IT WAS way too close for comfort, but wasn't it fun?

Most of those in the Memorial Stadium crowd of 77,672 remained in their seats for some time after Nebraska's dramatic drive and game-winning field goal as time expired. They probably needed time to catch their breath.

Those few fans who headed for the exits in disgust after Colorado took the lead on a two-point conversion with 47 seconds remaining had to be kicking themselves as they heard the huge roar erupt shortly thereafter.

I'll admit I had my doubts. With Nebraska's passing woes of late, moving the ball downfield looked like far from a sure thing with just 44 seconds (and one time out) remaining after the kickoff. And kicker Josh Brown hadn't been a model of consistency, making just four of nine for the season and one of two this day.

There was no margin for error on that amazing final drive. One bad snap, bounce, pass, slip or penalty, and the Huskers would have had back-to-back regular-season losses for the first time since 1976 (Iowa State and Oklahoma).

Thirty-nine seconds and a little Husker magic later, Nebraska was lining up for a 29-year field goal.

Brown, a sophomore from Foyil, Okla., made the kick, setting off an emotional celebration. Brown's excitement is displayed on this week's cover, as he leaps into the arms of teammate Judd Davies. It is a stark contrast to the disappointment displayed on the cover of last issue (inset), after the 29-28 loss at Kansas State.

You can read much, much more about the fantastic finish in this week's Huskers

Illustrated. You can also learn more about Davies, who made a significant contribution this season as a redshirt freshman. The heir apparent to Willie Miller is the focus of our feature story looking at the fullback position.

Our player profile is on rush end Kyle Vanden Bosch, an outstanding student, who is putting together a strong finish on the field. He had nine tackles, including three for losses, against Colorado.

The Buffaloes, who had taken the Huskers to overtime a year before in Boulder, suffered their third loss by three or fewer points in a 3-8 season. And the Huskers had their second narrow victory of the season.

Yes, the Huskers are one point away from being 10-1 and in the race for the BCS title game. But, considering the overtime victory at Notre Dame and the latest narrow escape, they could just as easily be 7-4.

It all amounts to another 9-2 season, not what most expected but certainly not all bad.

The Huskers will be invited to a bowl game. At this writing, it was far from certain where. Likely destinations included the Jan. 1 Cotton Bowl in Dallas or the Dec. 29 Holiday Bowl in San Diego.

It won't be Miami and it won't be for a national championship, but a 10th victory would be a positive conclusion to this season and a springboard into the 2001 season, when Nebraska gets Notre Dame, Oklahoma and Kansas State all at home.

We're getting way ahead of ourselves, but you can look ahead to next Nov. 23 in Boulder. CU quarterback Craig Ochs will have a year of seasoning, and the Buffs will be more primed and more ready than ever, after the results of the last two years.

It sounds like more fun. ■



### ON THE COVER

Josh Brown jumps into the arms of Judd Davies after kicking the winning field goal as time expired against Colorado. Photo by Scott Bruhn

### Got Something To Say?

Please send your comments and questions to: Letters, 3210 NW 3rd St., Lincoln, Neb. 68521. You can also fax them to us at (402) 474-5132. We reserve the right to edit the letters for clarity, content and length. For those with electronic mail abilities, Hleditor@aol.com.

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## Huskers Illustrated

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# Huskers Illustrated CONTENTS

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## 14 Quick Study

Freshman Judd Davies learns that blocking is a big part of playing fullback at Nebraska. *By Mike Babcock*

## NEXT ISSUE

The bowl preview issue will be mailed Dec. 18.

## DEPARTMENTS

<b>Letter From The Editor</b> .....	4
<b>NU Notebook</b> .....	6
<i>Jumping rope is serious business for freshman defensive back Willie Amos.</i>	
<b>State Of The Huskers</b> .....	8
<i>Freshman linebacker T.J. Hollowell has seen action on special teams, but that hasn't satisfied his urge to play.</i>	
<b>From The West</b> .....	10
<i>A playoff system would solve many of the problems associated with the BCS format.</i>	
<b>From The Beat</b> .....	12
<i>A conference playoff game can be a negative for a team hoping to play for the national championship.</i>	
<b>Player Profile</b> .....	18
<i>Academic All-American Kyle Vanden Bosch says that school has taken a backseat to football in his senior season.</i>	
<b>Colorado Game Recap</b> .....	21
<b>4th and Inches</b> .....	25
<b>Scouting Report</b> .....	26
<b>Colorado Game Statistics</b> .....	28
<b>The First 1</b> .....	30
<i>Dave Morock, a monster back on the 1970 teams, says the Huskers felt they should have beaten Southern Cal.</i>	
<b>Hoops</b> .....	34
<i>First-year Coach Barry Collier is emphasizing a change of attitude for center Kimani Ffriend and his Husker teammates.</i>	
<b>Side Out</b> .....	36
<i>The top-ranked Husker volleyball team hopes to earn its spot in the school's rich volleyball history.</i>	
<b>Grid Recruiting</b> .....	40
<i>More and more football recruits are continuing to take visits after committing to a school.</i>	
<b>Crossword Puzzle, Huskernutz</b> .....	44
<b>Final Word</b> .....	46





# Learning the Ropes

Willie Amos was the focus of a curious scene in the second-floor auditorium at the South Stadium office building one day during preseason football practice. He performed a jump-rope routine for his Cornhusker teammates and coaches. And "they went crazy," he said.

Jumping rope is serious business for the true freshman from Sweetwater, Texas. He was a member of a jump rope team that earned national and world titles in double-dutch competition and has tried to organize a jump rope team at Nebraska to perform at halftime of basketball games.

Though he has little time to use it, "I always carry my rope around," he said.

"Every once in a while I get a chance to practice."

But football and classes take up most of his time now.

Amos, who's listed third on the depth chart at free safety, behind junior Dion Booker and senior Troy Watchorn, is among four true freshmen who weren't redshirted this season. The others are strongside linebacker T.J. Hollowell, rush end Benard Thomas and cornerback Terrell Butler.

Amos was initially "upset" about not being allowed to redshirt.

"I wasn't sure because I looked at it as, (redshirting) it's five years, being able to finish school, getting stronger, knowing the program better, versus having experience," he said.

"That's about it, (getting) experience in games."

He hadn't resolved the issue in his own mind when Nebraska opened against San Jose State. But "I was on the sideline," he said, "and someone said, 'Second kickoff (team) be ready.'"

"I was like, 'Wait, what's the deal?' I didn't know what to do."

Because he was on the No. 2 kickoff coverage team, he ran onto the field. "The whole time I was thinking, 'Am I supposed to be out here?' I wasn't optimistic about it," he said.

He's still not certain that skipping a redshirt season was the best thing for



**Willie Amos was on a jump rope team that earned national and world titles.**

him. On the other hand, however, "if I had redshirted, I would have thought about it the other way," he said.

"It could have been either way. It would have been 50-50."

Redshirt or not, Amos never imagined he would be playing at Nebraska, or anywhere else for that matter. When he was a high school freshman, "I told myself I would never play college football because it looked too damaging (physically)," he said. "It looked real hard."

The physical demands weren't the only reason he didn't envision himself playing college football, however. "I never saw myself in that situation because I really don't look that far into the future," he said. "I let things flow. I try not to plan. I take things as they come."

That's been his approach for as long as he can remember.

And "I'm comfortable with that," Amos said.

"I'm having to plan things because of time management here in college. I have to deal with it then. But life itself, I still use my regular method, just taking things as they come."

Taking things as they come characterized his recruitment. He knew little about Nebraska when the Cornhuskers first contacted him during his junior year in high school.

"I didn't know anything," he said. "I didn't know the history. If you put me on 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire' and asked a question about Nebraska, I wouldn't know it."

"Some people know every player in college. I don't."

He didn't pay attention to football when he was younger. He never watched a complete football game at any level — high school, college or professional — until he was a high school freshman.

Nebraska didn't appeal to him because of its football reputation. In fact, when the Cornhuskers first sent him a recruiting letter, a teammate was the first to notice it.

The letter was addressed to him in care of Sweetwater High School and was left in his locker.

"I hear you got a letter from Nebraska," said the teammate.

"What are you talking about?" Amos replied.

He removed the letter and opened it. "Where's it from, Willie?" another teammate asked.

"Ah, it's from Nebraska," he said.

The Cornhuskers kept in contact, while other schools dropped out. Amos might have considered Colorado because "I love the mountains and everything," he said.

"But I don't know what happened to them."

His final decision was between Nebraska and TCU, an established program and one on the rise. "I would have liked to be part of that," Amos said of TCU. "It would have been nice."

Nebraska won out, however, because "this place, it's a great opportunity."

Coming to Nebraska forced his separation from the other two members of his jump rope team. They're still in Texas, living "about 45 minutes apart," he said.

"So I'm pretty sure they're doing it (jumping rope)"

He jumps, too, when he gets the opportunity. He has done demonstrations in elementary schools, and once "I was in the training room and they wanted me to see if I could do it with a leather rope," he said. "I did the same tricks with it. It comes with time, experience and practice."

"If you can do it with one rope, you can do it with all of them." ■

## CORRECTED TOTAL FOR CARLOS



**Carlos Polk**

Not exactly a Florida presidential election recount, but . . .

The statistics distributed immediately after Nebraska's 29-28 loss at Kansas State credited the Cornhuskers with only four assisted tackles. As is always the case, the coaches adjusted the totals after evaluating videotape of the game. Based on that evaluation, senior middle linebacker Carlos Polk was credited with seven assists to go with nine unassisted tackles, for a total of 16.

According to the post-game statistics, Polk had no assisted tackles.

Strongside linebacker Scott Shanle was credited with five tackles and six assists after the recount. ■



## CLASS ACT

The Cornhuskers have always been business-like in their approach to football. Rarely have there been players who have spoken out of turn or injudiciously about their opponents.

That's not surprisingly, according to senior co-captain and offensive guard Russ Hochstein.



**Russ Hochstein**

"They always talk about in business, company culture," he said. "I think that's the way with a team. There's a team culture. It's the beliefs you have. There's a way of doing things a team has."

"I think Nebraska very much has that. We have tradition. We've won nine games a year. We will win nine games a year, and if you don't play and perform to that level, you won't play."

"When guys come in here, they're recruited by coaches that have been around a while, have been in the program a while and understand that. And they don't recruit kids that won't do that."

Players who create controversy with words and behavior "can hurt a program's image," said Hochstein. "It can hurt a personal image. There are a lot of things involved, but more than anything, I think football is becoming more competitive every year. Every team is getting better and better."

"You don't have room to talk like that. You don't have to go out and blab your mouth off, say to everybody, 'I'm good. I'm good. You guys suck.' It's still basic, simple football."

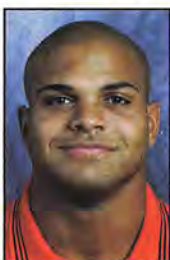
## ENDORISING ALEXANDER

Nebraska recruited Dan Alexander as a fullback, but he was quickly moved to I-back and became just the 23rd Cornhusker to rush for 1,000 or more yards in a season this year.

"Could Dan be an outstanding fullback in our system? I don't think there's any question he could be that," Coach Frank Solich said the week after the Kansas State game. "But would we have done as well as we have offensively without him at I-back sometimes, I don't know."

"We've got a lot of faith in the other guys there, of course. And some of those guys, their time will be here and it will be here very, very shortly. But he has done all that we've asked him to do."

Alexander and Correll Buckhalter are leaving the job to a group that includes sophomores Dahrran Diedrick and Thunder Collins and redshirted freshmen DeAntae Grixby and Josh Davis. ■



**Dan Alexander**

# QUICK HITS

*What's Happening In Nebraska Athletics?*

## HOOP RECRUITS, MEN

First-year men's basketball Coach Barry Collier's first recruiting class includes four players, three of them high school seniors, the fourth a junior college transfer.

The high school seniors are Jake Muhlheisen (6-foot-4, 185) from Lincoln, Neb., Corey Simms (6-5, 195) from St. Louis, Mo., and Dan Heimos (6-11, 215) from Waterloo, Ill.

The junior college transfer is Brennon Clemmons (6-2, 185) from Olney, Ill., Central College.

Collier already has one oral commitment for next year's recruiting class, from Roy Enright, a 6-9 junior at Burke High School in Omaha.

## HOOP RECRUITS, WOMEN

Katie Robinette from South Sioux City, Neb., one of the nation's top high school players, heads a list of three recruits for women's basketball Coach Paul Sanderford. "If we want to be a top program, we have to keep people like Katie Robinette in the state," Sanderford told the Lincoln Journal Star.

"Getting her was a huge key for our program."

The 6-2 Robinette picked the Huskers over such schools as Connecticut, Georgia, Tennessee and Iowa State. She is joined in the recruiting class by 5-6 Jina Johansen, a guard from Centura, Neb., High School and 5-10 Keasha Cannon from Penn Valley Community College.

Cannon, a junior college All-American, committed to Nebraska out of high school in Kansas City, Kan., two years ago but didn't meet eligibility requirements. She played both guard positions and small forward at Penn Valley, which is located in Kansas City, Mo.

## MAN WITH GOLDEN GLOVE

Former Cornhusker Darin Erstad, now a member of the Anaheim Angels, earned his first American League Gold Glove. The award is determined by a vote of managers and coaches.

## RECORD CROWD

The Nebraska volleyball team drew an NCAA-record 12,504 fans to the Bob Devaney Sports Center for its 15-12, 15-3, 15-13 victory against Colorado in early November.

The total surpassed the previous regular-season record of 11,529, also set by Nebraska in 1995.

"Volleyball needs this. It needs this kind of attention," Husker Coach John Cook told the Omaha World-Herald. "I think people in the state of Nebraska have really become attached to this team."

"I think this team has created interest not only because we're ranked No. 1, but we have nine out of 14 kids from Nebraska, and it's been hard to get a seat in the Coliseum."

Despite the record crowd, however, there is no thought of vacating the Coliseum.

## WEATHER OR NOT

The Nebraska football team has an all-weather offense, according to Coach Frank Solich.

"We really look at it from the standpoint that any weather is good weather to run our offense in," he said the week before the Kansas State game. "So it really doesn't make any difference."

"I think the real key is to make sure that you're a football team that doesn't let weather take you out of something. We have been that way over the years. We've been that way this year. And we intend to stay that way. So we're pretty well mentally conditioned to playing in any kind of weather."

## BRAINS AND BRAWN

Four Cornhusker football players were named District VII Academic All-Americans: split end Matt Davison (3.36 grade-point average, communication studies), rush end Kyle Vanden Bosch (3.828, finance), offensive tackle Dave Volk (3.357, psychology) and tight end Tracey Wistrom (3.214, mathematics).

## DAVEY O'BRIEN AWARD

Eric Crouch is among eight semifinalists for the Davey O'Brien Award, presented annually to the nation's top collegiate quarterback. The others are Drew Brees of Purdue, Woodrow Dantzler of Clemson, Joey Harrington of Oregon, Josh Heupel of Oklahoma, Marques Tuiasosopo of Washington, Michael Vick of Virginia Tech and Chris Weinke of Florida State. The winner will be announced Dec. 9. ■



## Staying Positive

*True freshman Hollowell ready to make bigger contribution*



**Mike Babcock**

THE ADVICE was sound. "Like my high school coach said, you focus on the negative, you get negative results. You focus on the positive, you get positive results," T.J. Hollowell said.

"I try not to think about all that negative stuff, just keep my mind on school and football."

Such an approach has helped the freshman strongside linebacker from Copperas Cove, Texas, get through his first collegiate season. He has adapted quickly to his new surroundings.

The season "went by pretty fast for me I'd say," Hollowell said.

But, he added, "I'm ready to get to the bowl game and then go home and see my family. I'm ready to see my mom. I know she misses me. As long as I get to go home, I'm happy."

"I'm homesick right now. A lot of us get discouraged."

Hollowell isn't discouraged about football, though. "I've learned so many things, it's unbelievable," he said. "These guys, even though they don't know it, they teach you a whole lot."

Considering his credentials, it wasn't as if he were starting from scratch. He was the career leader in tackles at Copperas Cove High, which is in the state's large-schools classification.

As a senior, he was credited with 159 tackles, including 21 for losses and three sacks. He played in the middle his final season in high school, but he's on the outside now. And he picked up the position quickly enough to climb to second on the depth chart, behind sophomore Scott Shanle.

Being promoted to No. 2 "was a big boost of confidence, I'll tell you that," said Hollowell.

The difference between high school football and college football probably didn't seem quite as great to him as it might have to some of the others in his recruiting class. "We ran our high school program like a college program, pretty much like here," he said. "So as far as getting adjusted, it wasn't that hard."

"I played at a real high level of competition. There were some good, real good, athletes."

He also wasn't overwhelmed by the speed of the college game, as so many are.

"It isn't as fast as I thought it was going to be," he said. "I thought it was going to be blazing, and I thought I was going to look like I was in slow-mo. But that adjustment, it wasn't too hard. You're just going to have some guys around you that fly faster than the guys in high school."

Hollowell, who ran on the 4x100-meter relay in high school, has been timed in the 100 in 10.5 seconds. So he was able to keep pace. And he was able to contribute on kicking teams.

He has played consistently well on kickoff and punt coverage, in fact.

Hollowell wasted no time in establishing himself on the kickoff team. He was involved in the tackles on Nebraska's

first two kickoffs of the season, against San Jose State.

That hasn't satisfied his urge to play. It has helped, however.

"The special teams thing is good for now," he said. "But there's nothing like being in the game. Special teams, if I have to do that to contribute, it's better than sitting on the sideline."

He had no preconceptions about playing or redshirting his first season. When defensive coordinator and linebackers coach Craig Bohl told him after two-a-day practices that he would be playing this season, "I was ready to redshirt or I was ready to (play as) a true freshman," Hollowell said.

"Basically, I was there if he needed me. That's how I was thinking. 'I'm here if you need me.' And I'm pretty sure all of the other freshman backers were the same way."

The Cornhuskers' scholarship recruiting class included three other players projected as outside linebackers: Jason Richenberger, Lannie Hopkins and Ira Cooper.

And there will be opportunity for all of them during spring practice. Though the top players at both positions — Shanle, Randy Stella and Mark Vedral — return, depth has been a concern.

"I can't wait," said Hollowell. "Me and Scott, we can't wait for next season. We just want to get on the field and act crazy and wild, you know? I haven't done it in so long. I've been on the sideline most of this year, so I can't wait to get out on the field and play with all that emotion."

Shanle has helped him this season, as have all the linebackers, which "shows you what kind of program we've got," Hollowell said. "They see me do something wrong, they're always correcting me and making sure I get it down because if

somebody goes down, somebody's got to step up.

"And you don't want them coming in and doing the wrong thing."

That was reinforced in the San Jose State game, when he got to play on defense in the fourth quarter, after the Cornhuskers had taken control. "I couldn't believe it," he said. "I was excited."

"I thought I was going to get toasted the first play. I was like, 'Oh man, what am I doing?' But I took a few snaps and got used to the speed of the game. I felt like I fit right in. The adrenaline goes crazy. I can't describe it. It's not something I can describe. You've just got to watch me."

Nebraska fans will have that opportunity for the next three seasons.

Hollowell has done the right thing as far as attitude is concerned, focusing on the positive and eschewing the negative. "I'm just thankful to be here," he said. "I thank God I'm here."

"I thank these coaches for giving me this opportunity to come here." ■



**T.J. Hollowell had seven tackles in the first 10 games.**

**Mike Babcock** is a former sports columnist for the Lincoln Journal Star. He has covered Nebraska football for more than 20 years.

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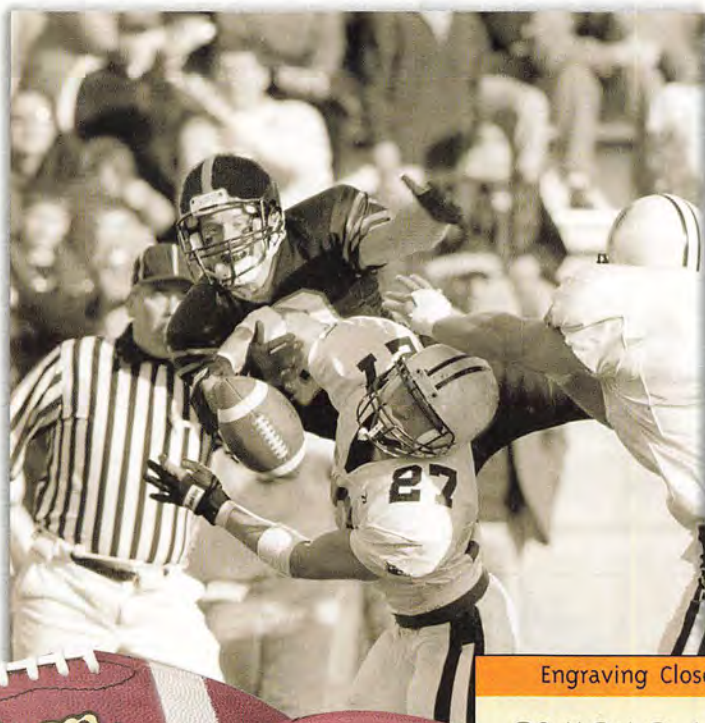


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# A Better Way?

*College playoff system would have many positives*



**Bob Schaller**

FACE IT.

The time has come.

In fact, the time has passed, when it comes right down to it.

What would the NCAA basketball season be liked if they crowned the national champion based only on regular season records, and had JUST ONE "bowl" basketball game that meant anything at the end of the season.

Surely, you could make an argument that this is sour grapes because Nebraska is so far out of the national championship picture.

But that's not the reason. Far from it, in fact.

The bowl system is antiquated. The entire BCS system is very flawed, and it benefits only the network that has the games, only the teams that are ranked at the top, and only the bowls in the BCS.

A playoff would solve that problem. On top of that, the bowls would actually get more publicity and be more worthwhile.

Think about it: What would you rather watch, the Las Vegas Bowl with maybe Iowa State and Texas Christian, or the Las Vegas Bowl with the No. 8 and No. 9 team in the first round of the playoffs?

Certainly, there are bowl games in mid-December anyway, so a playoff would need only one week added, the first week of December.

NCAA Division II football does it one way, taking the top four teams from each region for its playoff — I think it would be better to take the top 16 teams, regardless of region — but at least Division II is giving teams a shot, unlike Division I.

Interesting side note: You don't hear any of these coaches — the ones who coach in NCAA Football Playoffs — claiming the playoffs are "too hard on the kids" or pose logistical problems. Indeed, we hear so much about how Division I bowl teams practice and practice through December, only to play one game at the end of the month or in January.

On top of having eight bowls that get the huge reward of hosting a first-round playoff game, there would be four more that get "semifinal" games and another that gets the final. Maybe even a "third place" bowl game as well. That would mean 13 or 14 bowl games would have huge implications in determining a national champion, not just the one, or two (at the most) that have title implications now.

Really, though, that's not the important thing, though the deep-pocketed networks and our-hands-are-out-for-the-biggest-bidder BCS folks can't argue otherwise.

There is never a national champion in football. Maybe when Nebraska won in 1995, the Huskers were the best team in the land. Aside from that year, it's been a crashshoot. In fact, the argument could be made that neither Nebraska nor Michigan was the best team in 1997, and a playoff would've

cleared up that debate as well.

It's simply not fair to throw a team out of the national championship picture because of one loss. A team losing its quarterback for one week shouldn't have its national title hopes drained (Virginia Tech). Losing Michael Vick for a week didn't mean Tech wasn't the best team in the land this year.

And in general, one slip-up should not cause ANY team to fall out of the picture. The way it stands this year, the teams with one loss, but who are out of the top three — like Washington — are out of luck because of one game. And teams that have to play in a conference championship should be allowed two losses before being declared "out of the hunt" for a national title.

Plus folks, here's the kicker: This playoff would produce the most awesome college football games in history. In addition, there would be a "true" national champion. No computer — or sportswriter — should ever be determining the national champion.

There certainly would be a little quibbling over who the best 16 teams in the country are. But it's a far better debate to have to suffer through than the one at the end of each year. The national champion, as it stands now, is often the most fortunate team, with the most fortunate schedule, and least amount of bad luck in terms of injury, illness and maybe a bad call, or a "wide right" in a big game.

That's not a national champion.

The worst part is that it would be so easy to go to a playoff. No one ever talks about the fact that every division of college football, from I-AA to the lowest, has a playoff. The folks in Division I are the exceptions, not the rule. That this hasn't been publicized — especially in a year like this, where only an Oklahoma win in the Orange Bowl would squelch the debate — shows where the loyalty lies: To the almighty dollar, as in the BCS and bowl system.

The sad thing is, the networks and the bowls are the ones who would benefit the most financially from a playoff system. The coaches and players would benefit by knowing who is truly No. 1, having that ranking earned, not judged by either a computer or a bunch of chubby guys who have never laced up a pair of cleats (or likely even see their shoes in a few years).

And the biggest winner would be the fans: Imagine this, as it stands now: Nebraska facing Washington, Oklahoma playing a school like Oregon, Miami taking on Texas A&M; Florida State playing K-State, and Oregon State taking on Notre Dame. That could be just five of the eight quarterfinals.

It gives you goose bumps just thinking about it. ■



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**Bob Schaller** covers the Huskers for the North Platte Telegraph and Scottsbluff Star-Herald. He can be reached at [schallerrc@aol.com](mailto:schallerrc@aol.com).



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# Added Burden

*Conference playoff game can be a negative for team hoping to play for national championship*



**Curt McKEEVER**

OKLAHOMA HAS ALREADY PROVEN it's the best team in the Big 12 Conference. But if you're a Sooners fan and have followed the league championship from afar, you're a bit nervous entering Saturday's rematch against Kansas State.

The game at Arrowhead Stadium will be the fifth Big 12 title game.

Twice in its brief history, a team has been knocked out of playing for the national championship because of a loss in the contest.

In 1996, Texas knocked off Nebraska. And, in 1998, Texas A&M ended Kansas State's hopes.

Thus, the debate continues about whether having such a championship is good or bad for the Big 12.

Despite the upsets, Commissioner Kevin Weiberg is a staunch supporter of the game.

Sure, a certain result might mean the league gets one spot instead of two in the Bowl Championship Series. But Weiberg notes that this year's game is expected to generate a pot of \$8 million for Big 12 schools.

A BCS bowl is worth \$4-6 million to league members.

"I do agree that it can have a significant competitive impact on a team at the end of the season, like an Oklahoma that's trying to get into the national championship game," Weiberg said. "If you enter the game with a (No.) 1 or 2 ranking in the BCS poll, you are at some risk as a result of the game. On the other hand, if you enter 3, 4 or in a different position in the poll, the extra game can be a benefit in the calculation of that final BCS poll."

"Another important aspect, in a 12-member conference, it would be very difficult to determine a true champion without having some kind of game like this. With a young conference that's still developing an identity, it's important that we have a showcase championship game. With three teams that you don't play in the regular season, I think it would be a very watered-down championship without a championship game."

A closely watched phenomenon at this week's game will be the weather. This is the first time the contest is at an outdoor stadium, and with the game moved to a 7 p.m. start by ABC, league officials are keeping their fingers crossed.

The 2001 contest also is outdoors — at Texas Stadium in Dallas — and Weiberg said the weather at this year's game could be a factor when the Big 12 championship committee meets to sort through the process of selecting football sites beyond 2001.

Weiberg hopes to be able to announce future sites as early as this spring's Big 12 meetings or before the start of next season. As it stands now, the Big 12 has contracted with ABC to hold a championship game through the 2007 season.

But enough about the future. What about this week's game?

It was back on Oct. 14 in Manhattan, Kan., that the college football world began to take serious note of Oklahoma. Sure, the Sooners had clobbered Texas 63-14 the previous week, but if you didn't know, the Longhorns had suffered their share of blowout losses in recent years, you just wrote it off to the flukeyness of a rivalry series.

But what OU did to Kansas State was downright jaw-jarring.

By halftime, the Sooners, then No. 8 in the national polls, had scored 31 points and led the Nos. 2 and 3 Wildcats by 17.

This from a program that was just three years removed from a 4-8 season that included a 69-7 loss to Nebraska.



**Big 12 Commissioner Kevin Weiberg is a staunch supporter of the playoff game.**

OK, so the Sooners had to hold off a late rally, as K-State pulled to 38-31 and then got the ball back. But the OU defense held on three downs, and then Heisman Trophy front-runner Josh Heupel directed a game-clinching 11-play drive that netted a field goal to make it a two-possession game. Heupel finished the afternoon 29 of 37 for 374 yards and two touchdowns.

"He's done it every week," Coach Bob Stoops said. "He's put us in this position. Without him, we're not here."

Kansas State isn't where it's at without its quarterback, either.

Jonathan Beasley, labeled by many as not being good enough to deliver the Wildcats a North Division title, vindicated himself from a poor performance against Nebraska last season by orchestrating a 29-28 win against the Huskers on Nov. 11.

While he hit just 12 of 36 passes, he made all of his completions count, finishing with 234 yards and two touchdowns. Beasley also scrambled for gains of 18 and 9 yards on K-State's game-winning drive that he capped with a 12-yard pass to Quincy Morgan with 2:52 to play.

Some say Kansas State might have the mental edge. But you know what? No one — not even Orange Bowl-bound Florida State — can match the kind of swagger the Sooners will take into the game.

Boomer Sooner has outscratched the 'Cats, overcome a 14-point deficit against Nebraska, and erased a 10-point fourth-quarter hole at Texas A&M.

Kansas State lost on the same field to the Aggies.

Barring a blizzard in Arrowhead, this Big 12 championship shouldn't end up a disaster. The best team should win and do the league proud by moving on to Miami.

As for those nervous Oklahoma fans. They ought to know that both of the previous title games played at a Northern site were won by the Big 12 South champ. ■

*Curt McKeever is a sportswriter, covering the University of Nebraska for the Lincoln Journal Star. In addition to reporting on football he is the primary beat writer for the men's basketball and baseball teams.*





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# Quick Study

**Freshman  
Davies learns  
that blocking is  
a big part of  
being a Husker  
fullback**

**By Mike Babcock**

*"Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise."*

— English poet Thomas Gray

**I**n retrospect, Judd Davies didn't know what he didn't know.

"Last year, maybe I was a little naïve," Nebraska's redshirted freshman fullback said. "The funny thing is, I feel like I really didn't know how far behind I was until I got to this year."

"I might have thought I had things a little better than I did."

Davies, a member of the Cornhuskers' 1999 scholarship recruiting class, arrived last fall with an opportunity to play without redshirting because of the lack of depth at fullback.

He even suited up for early season games until the redshirt decision was made.

He had the physical skills to play immediately. No one doubted that. But he had a lot to learn, particularly as a blocker — which is his position's primary responsibility.

Davies played fullback at Omaha's Millard North High School, and he





**Judd Davies has learned that the fullback's primary responsibility is to block. But he has made the most of his opportunities, rushing 17 times for 183 yards through the first 10 games.**

block is going to set up. In high school, your size or maybe your speed can make up for what you lack in maybe your steps or maybe even your knowledge.

"But when you come here, you've got to be able to put it all together to make it work."

Speed can be an equalizer, if not an advantage, for those a fullback must block. At 6-feet tall and 245 pounds, Davies is bigger than many of the defenders he has encountered.

"I would say I'm mostly dealing with guys my size or smaller in weight," he said. "I think Nebraska fullbacks are maybe some of the heaviest, and most linebackers, it seems, are around the 230 (pound) range. But a lot of times, we have to block guys that are around 200 or 210."

Outside linebackers, for example, "now are smaller and quicker," he said.

His size advantage is negated to some extent because "you can't just run at them full speed and expect to get a block," he said. "Most likely they're going to be a little bit better, more of an athlete than I am, and they're going to be able to out-manuever me," said Davies.

"So you have to have good footwork and be smart about your blocks. It's very difficult, controlled aggression, and gosh, it's really frustrating at times."

Confronted by a quick defender, "you've got to get to him. You've got to get squared up on him," Davies said. "You can't let him get around you. So there's a fine line you have to walk."

He was speaking figuratively, of course. A more accurate phrase would be "fine line to run."

Fullbacks share a responsibility with offensive linemen. But their opportunities for knockdown blocks are probably more limited because they rarely have the element of surprise.

"We usually don't get a lot of shots at guys where they don't know we're coming," said Davies. "It's usually pretty much a head-on shot. I wish every time I hit somebody I'd be able to square up and knock him into next week. But you've got to balance it out and make sure you get the play going."

Nebraska's fullbacks also have to

was a good one. He rushed for 2,700 yards and scored 45 touchdowns during his varsity career.

But Nebraska doesn't recruit fullbacks for their running ability alone.

At the high school level, the fullback often is "just a big back in the offense and maybe the priority wasn't blocking," said Cornhusker running backs coach Dave Gillespie.

"There wasn't a great deal of time spent on that, so it's the biggest adjustment."

Davies has adjusted quickly. But "of course, I'm impatient," Gillespie said.

"I forget that he's just a redshirt freshman. He's really far along for a redshirt freshman. Sometimes it's easy to do that (forget) because he does play awfully well, kind of above his years."

The 19-year-old Davies also has the maturity of someone older. He's

confident. But he also acknowledges his shortcomings. And he has the patience Gillespie claims to lack.

Though he's satisfied to have contributed this season as senior Willie Miller's back-up, "I don't know if I ever set a pace for myself," said Davies. "I feel like every game I'm able to get a little bit better and get a grasp on what we're trying to get accomplished, or get adjusted to the speed of the game."

As most young college players quickly discover, the game is significantly faster than the one to which they were accustomed in high school.

"It's a huge difference," Davies said. "If you take a wrong step, if you make a wrong cut, you're probably going to miss your block or miss the hole."

"So we really have to have a good idea where things are going to break, where your guy that you need to

Scott Bruhn



reconcile their desire to carry the ball with the more pressing need to clear the way for others. Nevertheless, Davies has proven he's a more than adequate runner.

He also has shown an ability to catch the ball this season.

"Judd has very good hands and can adjust to a ball pretty well for a big guy, which is important in being a guy that can catch the ball kind of out in space," Gillespie said.

"He's an athletic guy, and we feel real comfortable throwing him the ball."

In the Kansas game, Davies gained 27 yards on a pass from Jammal Lord. His longest play of the season through the first 10 games, however,

was a 57-yard run against Baylor.

That's not the way his position is defined, though. "It's tempting to think if you break off a big run as a fullback, or score a touchdown, that you've played a good game," said Davies, who scored his first touchdown as a Cornhusker on a 3-yard run near the end of the Kansas game.

"A lot of times, the case is, you may break off two or three good runs but you may have had a horrible day blocking. You have to be able to balance those things out and be happy with the runs, but also realize that really where we probably most benefit the team is in our blocking."

That much he knew when he arrived at Nebraska. ■

# Intense, Serious Business

Judd Davies has his light moments, like anyone else.

"Oh sure," he said. "I would say so."

But, for the most part, those moments aren't on the football field, and they seem rare even in the hallway outside the locker room, when he passes reporters following practice.

"Not around here," said Davies. "But there's definitely a different side of me when I get away from here. When I'm around here, I think it's important to help me focus to try to be fairly serious and pretty intense in what I'm trying to do. It seems to help me practice the best."

Nebraska's fullbacks have always been characterized by a no-nonsense attitude.

That tradition goes back to when Frank Solich played fullback for Coach Bob Devaney, and before.

Regardless of the position, "you have to be relentless. You have to have a desire to punish guys in front of you," Davies said. "But as a fullback, you have to be even more (so)."

Hence, the stern demeanor, "especially on the field," he said.

"I feel like it's pretty much time to go to work. I think it's hard to approach fullback any other way because it requires so much of you physically. It's so physically demanding every play."

The physical demands have to be balanced by technique, however.

"If you don't go in there with good pad level, good speed, you get your head knocked pretty good," said Davies. "As a fullback, I would say the intensity of some of the collisions you make requires a little bit more technique in your blocking. So the mindset has to be, I would say, unselfish."

At fullback, "there's little room for error," he said. "But it's the same for the rest of the positions."

Dave Gillespie, his position coach, considers him a no-nonsense guy.

"I think that's probably true," Gillespie said. "He takes things very serious. But I'm sure he has his moments of fun as well. He's got a good sense of humor, but it's kind of a dry sense of humor."

Davies also "is a very intelligent kid," said Gillespie.

His grade-point average for his first two semesters was a perfect 4.0. ■

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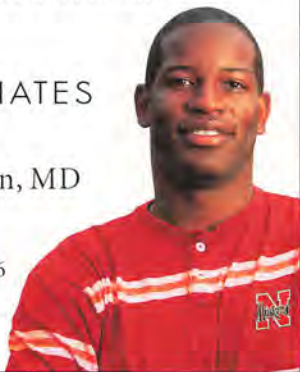
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# No Average Student

**Academic All-American  
Vanden Bosch gives  
football extra time  
during senior season**

**K**yle Vanden Bosch admits he let his schoolwork slide a little this semester.

You wouldn't have expected that of Nebraska's senior rush end and co-captain. He's an Academic All-American and carries a 3.822 cumulative grade-point average in a finance major.

But school took a backseat to football in his final season of eligibility.

It had to be that way, as far as Vanden Bosch was concerned. His commitment to the football team superseded classes and personal concerns. "I wanted to make sure everything was done right on the football field," he said. "So that meant extra time, extra meetings, whatever it took."

He invested the majority of his time and energy into leading the team.

"And, at times, I think it was too much," he said.

The demands of football are considerable even without a captain's responsibility.

"It can be overwhelming," said Vanden Bosch. "We're not average students."

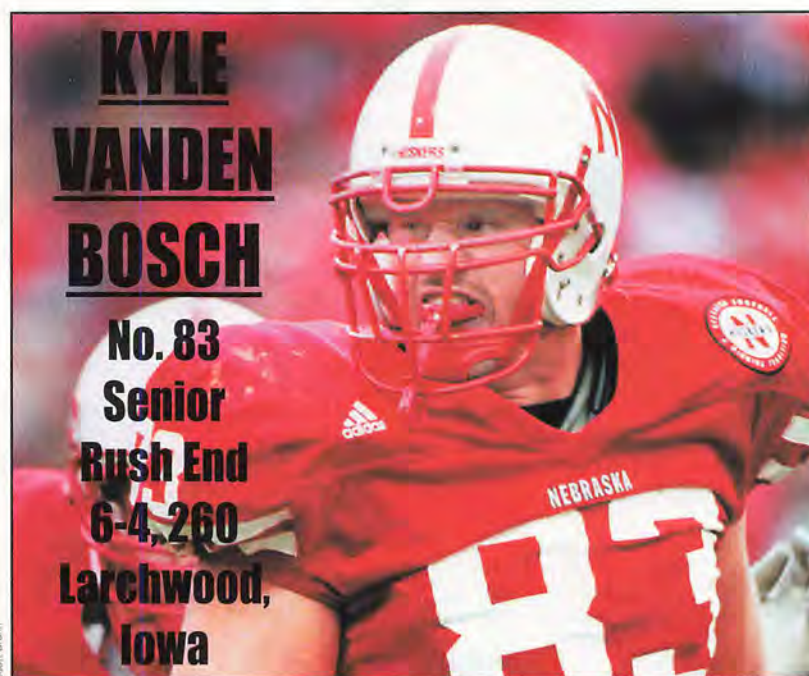
Football players spend time in the weight room and in meetings as well as on the practice field. And they have to do those things in addition to carrying a full-time course load.

Sometimes those two worlds collide. "When you have a day with two exams, you can't study as much as you need to. You can't prepare. You really don't have time to sit down and do all of your assignments like other students do. That's a sacrifice we have to make," Vanden Bosch said.

"But we love what we do. We don't complain. We wouldn't have it any other way."

Despite his attention to football business this season, Vanden Bosch will receive his finance degree in December, just three and a half years after arriving at Nebraska in the fall of 1997.

Vanden Bosch contributed to Nebraska's third national championship in four years, playing on special teams and backing up Chad Kelsay on the left side.



Because of Kelsay, a seventh-round draft pick of the Pittsburgh Steelers in 1999, Vanden Bosch picked up the pace in the classroom so that he could finish his degree in three and a half years.

Kelsay also played as a true freshman and never redshirted. But he didn't graduate early. So he was still taking classes during the spring semester of his final year, after football was finished. That created problems for him because of the demands of preparing for the NFL draft.

Some players who complete their eligibility withdraw from school in order to concentrate on the draft. But Kelsay, like Vanden Bosch, was an Academic All-American, and determined to get a degree.

So in addition to playing in the Senior Bowl all-star game, screening agents, testing for NFL scouts and going to the NFL's scouting Combine, Kelsay took 12 credit hours.

"He couldn't focus 100 percent on classes or 100 percent on football," Vanden Bosch said. "I think it was really kind of a difficult semester for him. I wanted to make sure I got all that out of the way so I could focus on football."

"If that doesn't work out, I can come back and go to graduate school. But I want to make sure I can focus on football."

Vanden Bosch aspires to playing professionally. And he has the creden-

tials. "I want to give everything that I've got to try to make it at the next level," he said.

"But I think if you put all your eggs in one basket, you kind of get into trouble, where if you get injured or things don't go your way, you're kind of stuck. I wanted to make sure I've got other things I can fall back on."

Specifically, he'll have the finance degree on which he can fall back.

His association not only with Kelsay but also with Grant Wistrom, another former teammate and Academic All-American, has shaped his practical attitude toward pro football.

"He's talked to me a lot about how difficult it is," Vanden Bosch said.

Wistrom, who's in his third season with the Super Bowl champion St. Louis Rams, has told him that pro football is "a different game. After college, not as many people are playing for love of the game," said Vanden Bosch. "When you get to the NFL, you don't hang out with the guys."

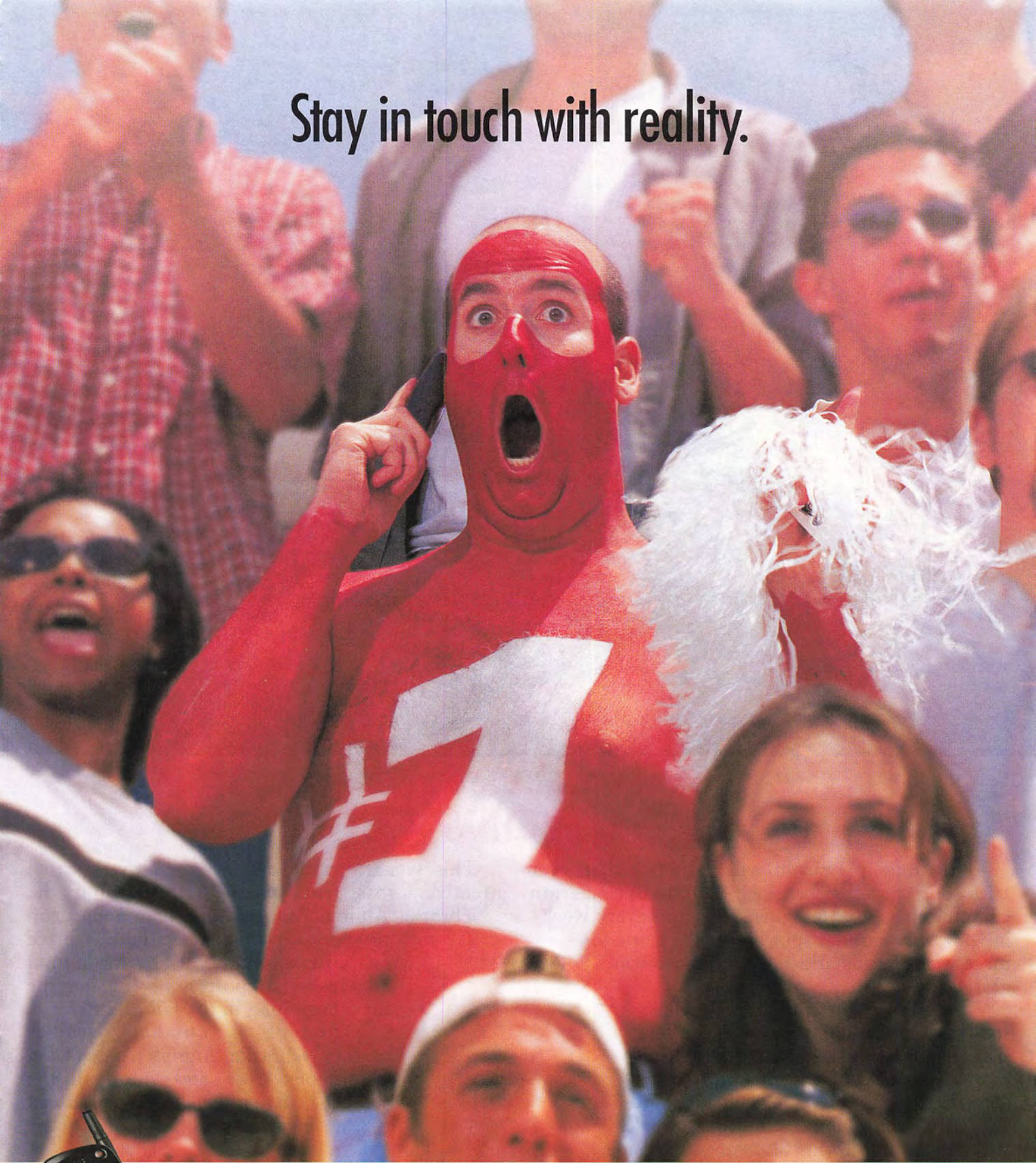
Hanging out with the guys and the relationships he has established with teammates and coaches have been the essence of the Cornhusker football experience for Vanden Bosch.

"That's the most important thing I've gotten," he said.

That's why his schoolwork might have suffered this semester. He owed it to them. ■



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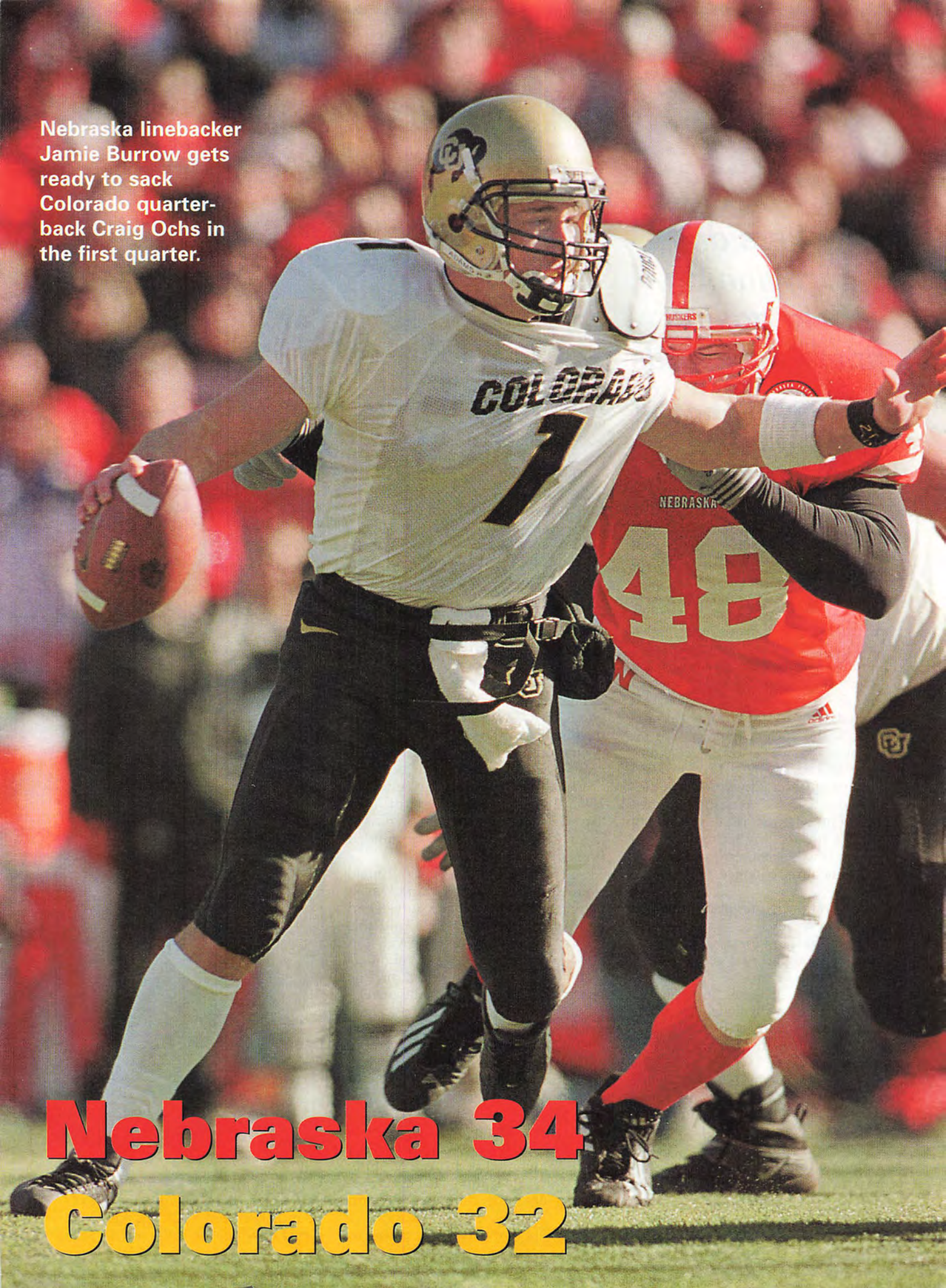


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**Nebraska 34**  
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# Fantasti

## *Huskers drive for winning field goal in final 44 seconds*

**By Mike Babcock**  
**Photos by Scott Bruhn**

**J**osh Brown leaped into Judd Davies' arms. And Jon Bowling buried them both.

In an instant they all were beneath a celebratory mass of red jerseys near the 20-yard line at the south end of Memorial Stadium. "There must have been a thousand and some odd pounds on me," Brown, his face still flushed with the afternoon's excitement, told reporters later.

The only face he could recognize as he looked up from the FieldTurf was that of Jason Schwab, who couldn't move either. "You know when Schwabbie's stuck right on top of you, it's not looking too good," said Brown. "I was screaming and kicking and punching, trying to get people off of me."

Celebration is one thing. But this was about survival.

"I was gasping for air," he said. "I honestly thought I was going to die." Reason had been swept away by unrestrained emotion, precipitated by Brown's 29-yard field goal as the final seconds elapsed in Nebraska's 34-32 victory against Colorado.

Brown's kick, which split the south uprights, capped a dramatic seven-play, 47-yard series that transformed a one-point Colorado lead, gained by an all-or-nothing two-point conversion with 47 seconds remaining, into unimaginable disappointment and frustration for the Buffaloes.

Nothing short of a miracle could have salvaged the victory for

Josh Brown celebrates with fellow kicker Chace Long after booting the game-winning field goal from 29 yards out as time expired.

Nebraska. "When you're in a situation as we were right at the very end, nine out of 10 people tell you (that) you can't do it," said Cornhusker Coach Frank Solich. "But if you say you can do it, you have a chance to get it done."

"And I think that's what our players said at that given time."

The passing of quarterback Eric Crouch also helped to get it done.

Crouch, whose passing was considered suspect following a 2-for-13 performance in a 29-28 loss at Kansas State, completed 11-of-17 against Colorado, including 5-of-6 on the final drive.

"Eric is a guy who never loses his composure," Solich said.

Crouch had run 26 yards for his third touchdown of the afternoon to give Nebraska a 31-24 lead with 5:20 remaining in the nationally televised game. But Craig Ochs, Colorado's freshman quarterback, showed composure of his own in directing an 11-play, 68-yard touchdown drive.

Ochs finished off the drive with a 15-yard pass to John Minardi, then tossed a two-point conversion pass to Javon Green to put the upset-minded Buffaloes in the lead, 32-31.

But Crouch, ever the optimist, claimed his confidence didn't waver. "You've got to believe in yourself and your team," he said. "I've said this before, if you don't believe you can go down and score, you might as well just give up then, sit on the bench and throw in the white towel."

Colorado tried to take time off the clock with a bouncing kickoff that third-team I-back Dahrnan Diedrick scooped up at his own 29-yard line and returned to his own 41.

The winning drive began there, with 44 seconds remaining.

On first down, Crouch threw a pass intended for split end Matt Davison, who battled unsuccessfully with Colorado's Phil Jackson for possession near the Buffaloes' 20-yard line.

The next two plays were passes to



wingback John Gibson, for gains of 6 and 9 yards. Gibson ran out-of-bounds both times, giving Nebraska a first down at the Colorado 44 with



# c Finish



## Husker Player of the Game

### Brown 'Just Ran Out' to Kick Game Winner

Frank Solich didn't encourage Josh Brown before the sophomore from Foyil, Okla., ran onto Tom Osborne Field to kick the winning, 29-yard field goal against Colorado. He couldn't.

"I couldn't find him to calm him down," Solich said after the Cornhuskers' 34-32 victory. "He just ran onto the field to kick it. Apparently, he was bursting with confidence."

Brown's game-winning kick with no time left was Nebraska's first in at least 40 years, according to the Nebraska sports information office, which has play-by-plays on file since 1960.

Even though Brown has struggled at times this season, "he's an excellent kicker," said Solich.

"I don't think there's a kicker out there who's not going to miss some. If you go in the tank because you miss a couple or if there's no belief in a guy because he misses a couple or if he doesn't believe in himself because he misses a couple, he shouldn't be a kicker.

"Those things are going to happen to all kickers."

Quarterback Eric Crouch did his part to help alleviate the pressure by passing the Cornhuskers from their own 41-yard line to the Colorado 12 with 5 seconds remaining.

Brown "proved to himself today that he can be a great clutch field goal kicker," Crouch said.



Josh Brown

"I think he might have questioned himself before, but I think after this today, it's a new-found confidence for him, and for everyone else on this team also, to believe in him."

Brown was predictably ecstatic about being raised up on his teammates' shoulders.

"That kind of scenario, I never dreamed that would happen to me," he said. "It's something that very rarely happens. I don't know that it's ever even happened here that I've witnessed or seen on television. So it's definitely a moment in my life that I will cherish and never forget." ■

29 seconds left.

Next, Crouch completed a pass to wingback Bobby Newcombe in the middle of the field for a 13-yard gain.

Then, with the clock running, he kept for a 2-yard gain to the Colorado 29.

"Even with the headset (on), I heard a few groans on that one,"

Solich said of the play call.

Assuming the Buffaloes, like the fans who groaned, were expecting a pass, "if Eric could have broken



through, he could have gotten a lot of yards; he could have gotten out-of-bounds.

"And we would have attempted a field goal then, right after that."

Instead, Nebraska used its final timeout with 10 seconds left, and a 47-yard field goal away.

A Crouch-to-Newcombe pass took the ball to the 12-yard line and reduced the field goal's distance to 29 yards. Newcombe took the ball out-of-bounds to stop the clock at :05.

Brown had kicked a 20-yard field goal with 9:22 remaining to tie the score at 24, after missing on a 32-yard attempt with 3:50 remaining in the first half. Up to the point when he ran onto the field, he cheered his teammates from the sideline. "I didn't take any warm-up kicks," he said.

"I was like, 'This is exactly what I've already done today. Don't yank it. Please don't yank it.'"

John Garrison snapped the ball. And punter Dan Hadenfeldt set it down.

"It seemed like a split-second," said Brown, who improved to 5-of-10 for the season. "I kicked the ball, looked up, and everybody went crazy. It's definitely how I pictured it in a dream."

Two weeks before, the dream had turned to a nightmare in the form of a failed 28-yard field goal attempt in the second quarter of the Cornhuskers' one-point loss at Kansas State.

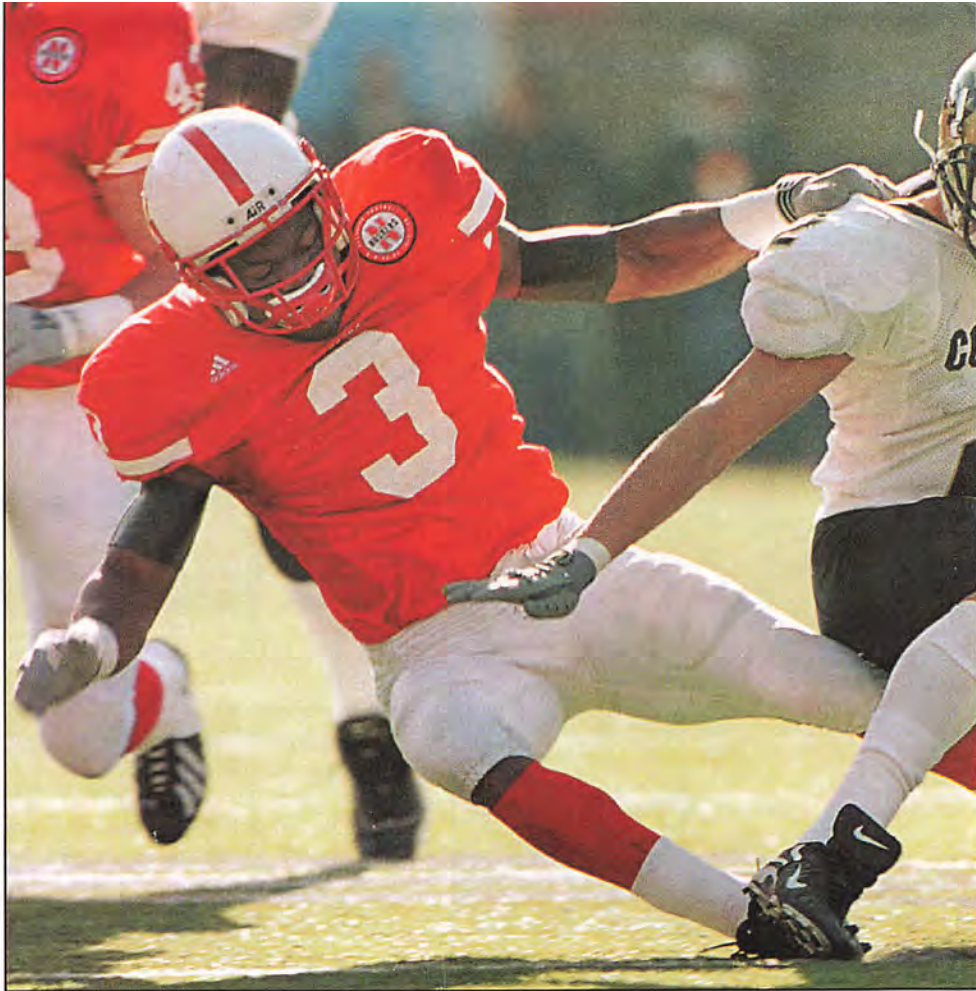
"I would call it a redemption kick for me, for the whole season," Brown said of the 29-yarder. "I don't think I've had a year I've expected myself to have. My whole goal is to (be) perfect."

"It definitely makes up for a lot of mistakes that I've made along the road this season. Kansas State was a hard one to take. It was a hard thing to swallow, and for a couple of days, it really gave me a lot of trouble mentally. But those are things you have to look beyond."

"I really did start to doubt myself. That's something I can't afford to do. This team can't afford to have me do that. So it was something I had to get control of. I had to overcome it myself, without anyone's help, stick to what I was doing and what I believed in."

Some Cornhuskers watched the kick go through the uprights. Some watched it on the HuskerVision screens. And some couldn't watch, depending on the crowd reaction instead.

"I watched," said Crouch. "I think as far as driving down the field and



Above, Keyuo Craver takes down CU receiver John Minardi. At right, defensive tackle Loran Kaiser picks up Coach Frank Solich during pregame ceremonies honoring Nebraska's 27 seniors.

doing what we did, I had no other choice but to watch and see what happened. After Josh made that field goal, it was just like a huge piano was lifted off your back, and a couple of gorillas that had been hanging out all day."

Like many of his teammates, Crouch risked injury by joining the celebration. "I figured if I risked it all day long, I might as well risk it in that pile-up and show some of the emotion and praise that Josh deserved," he said. "But I wasn't in there very long; I know that much."

Brown wasn't under the pile any longer than he had to be.

"I was already breathing hard," he said. "I could see Schwabbie looking at me from the pile, stuck. I could see them all looking at me and they couldn't get up, either."

After a ride on his teammates' shoulders, reporters surrounded him before he could leave the field. "I'm trying not to think," he told them. "I'm just happy to be alive right now." ■







# 4TH & 1NCHES

## Notes And Quotes From The Colorado Game

### GOOD HANDS PERSON

Cornhusker middle linebacker Carlos Polk opened the scoring by intercepting a pass on the game's second play from scrimmage and returning it 39 yards for a touchdown.

Nebraska had a 7-0 lead with only 49 seconds elapsed.

Polk "brags that he has the best hands in the country, and he showed it on that play," said Cornhusker defensive coordinator Craig Bohl. "At that time of the game, it seemed awful early.

"But as you look now at all the points, that proved to be a really important play for us."

Polk didn't dispute his claim to the nation's best hands. "I've dropped a couple in practice, but hey, that's what it is, practice," the senior from Rockford, Ill., said. He drew an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty for a windmill spike of the ball in the end zone.

"I told Coach, 'I'm going to get an touchdown and I'm going to spike it,' " he said.

He was hesitant to leave the field, however, until he saw a smile on the sideline. Then it was, "all right. It's cool. I can go back over there," said Polk.

Cornerback Erwin Swiney also intercepted Colorado quarterback Craig Ochs, who finished with 25 completions in 41 attempts for 254 yards and one touchdown.

Ochs is a freshman from Boulder, Colo.

### LAST POSSESSION

When Nebraska was going 69 yards on only five plays to take a 31-24 lead with 5:20 remaining, Cornhusker center Dominic Raiola decided "this is what it comes down to — we're going to go score-for-score (with Colorado). The first team to make a mistake loses."

He was right about matching scores. But "nobody made a mistake," he said.

Colorado Coach Gary Barnett would have disagreed. His decision to have a squib kick on the final kickoff, after the Buffaloes went ahead 32-31, was poorly executed. "If you're going to kick it to them like we did, then we might as well have done anything other than that," he said.

Nebraska's Dahrran Diedrick returned the kick 12 yards to the Cornhusker 41-yard line.

### WOUNDED PRIDE

Colorado rushed for 197 yards, with tailback Cortlen Johnson getting 155 of the yards and three touchdowns on 26 carries. "We take pride in stopping the run," said Cornhusker rush end Kyle Vanden Bosch. "Nobody has been able to power the ball on us all year.

"It seemed like they were powering the ball at us all game.

"That's real frustrating. As a Blackshirt, you take a lot of pride in stopping the run first. It's something we'll have to go back and work on. But we'll get that worked out."

Vanden Bosch, a co-captain and one of 27 seniors who suited up for Nebraska for the final time at Memorial Stadium, did his part to halt the run. He was unofficially credited with a team-high nine tackles, including eight unassisted and three for losses.

"What we were probably most disappointed in was Colorado's ability to run the football on our defense," Bohl said. "The style of defense we have is such that we're going to stress our secondary some. But what we cannot do is allow the running game to get going."

### BRIEFLY NOTED

— Nebraska has won its last five games against Colorado by a combined 15 points. The Buffaloes have scored a combined 39 points in the fourth quarters of the last two games between the teams.

Colorado's 32 points were the most by a losing team in the 59-year history of the series.

— Nebraska has now won at least nine games in 32 consecutive seasons and in 34 seasons all-time. The victory was the Cornhuskers' ninth in a row against Colorado, dating to a 19-19 tie in 1991.

— Quarterback Eric Crouch led the Cornhuskers in rushing, with 125 yards on 20 carries. He also scored three touchdowns to tie Calvin Jones for third all-time in career rushing touchdowns, with 40.

I-backs Dan Alexander and Correll Buckhalter combined to rush for 166 yards.■



## 2000 Results

(Team's current record in parentheses)

- 1 Sept. 2 San Jose State (7-5), W 49-13
- 2 Sept. 9 at Notre Dame (9-2), W 27-24
- 3 Sept. 23 Iowa (3-9), W 42-13
- 4 Sept. 30 Missouri (3-8), W 42-24
- 5 Oct. 7 at Iowa State (8-3), W 49-27
- 6 Oct. 14 at Texas Tech (7-6), W 56-3
- 7 Oct. 21 Baylor (2-9), W 59-0
- 8 Oct. 28 at Oklahoma (11-0), L 31-14
- 9 Nov. 4 Kansas (4-7), W 56-17
- 10 Nov. 11 at Kansas St. (10-2), L 29-28
- 11 Nov. 24 Colorado (3-8), W 34-32

## Big 12 Standings

	North			
	Conf.	All		
Kansas State	6 2	10 2		
Nebraska	6 2	9 2		
Iowa State	5 3	8 3		
Colorado	3 5	3 8		
Kansas	2 6	4 7		
Missouri	2 6	3 8		

	South			
	Conf.	All		
Oklahoma	8 0	11 0		
Texas	7 1	9 2		
Texas A&M	5 3	7 4		
Texas Tech	3 5	7 5		
Oklahoma State	1 7	3 8		
Baylor	0 8	2 9		

### Nov. 18 results

Kansas State 29, Missouri 24  
Oklahoma 27, Texas Tech 13  
Iowa State 38, Kansas 17  
Oklahoma State 50, Baylor 22

### Nonconference opponents

Minnesota 27, Iowa 24  
Notre Dame 45, Rutgers 17  
Tulsa 28, San Jose State 17

### Nov. 24 results

Nebraska 34, Colorado 32  
Texas 43, Texas A&M 17

### Nov. 25 results

Oklahoma 12, Oklahoma State 7

### Nonconference opponents

Notre Dame 38, Southern Cal 21  
Fresno State 37, San Jose State 6

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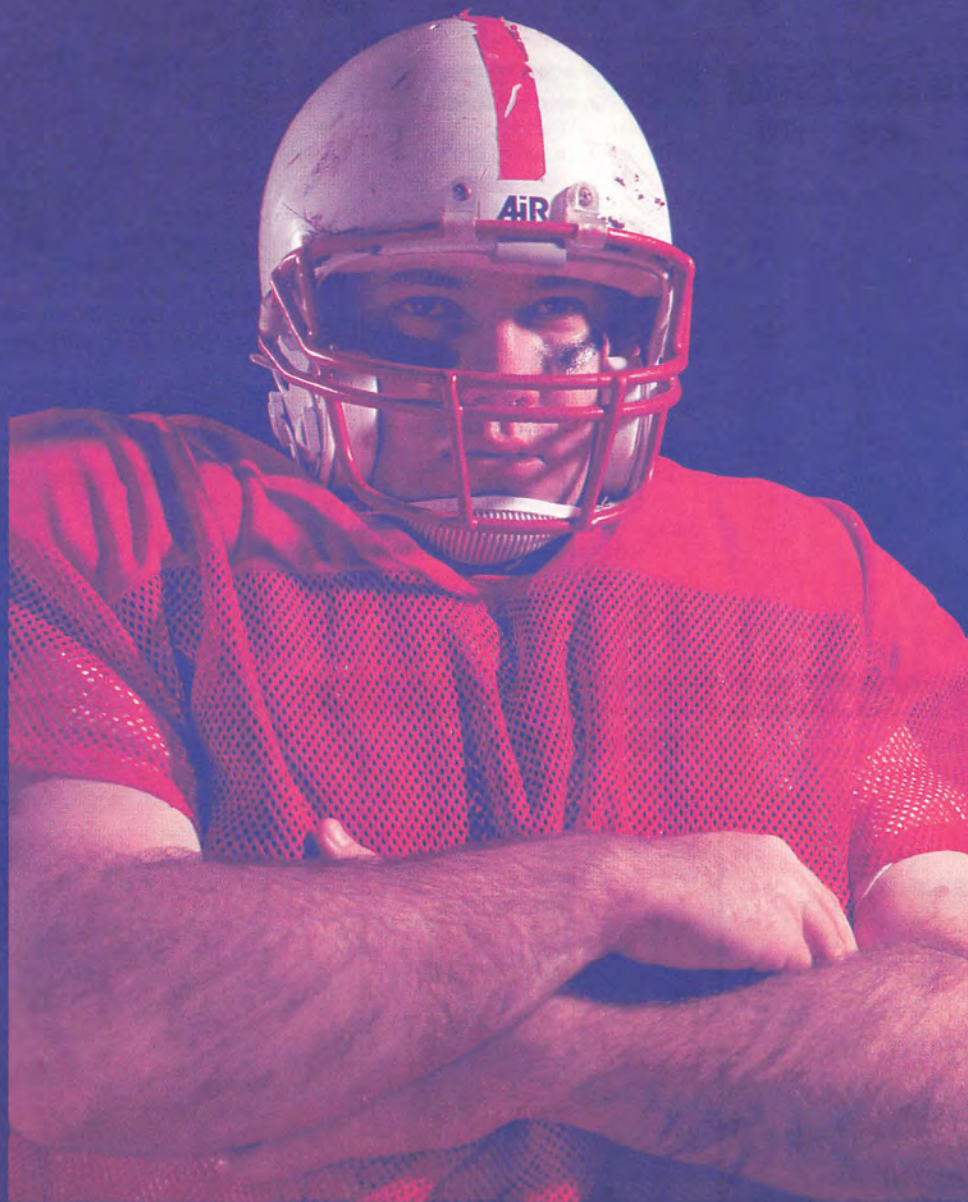
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# BY THE NUMBERS

## Colorado vs. Nebraska Nov. 24, 2000 • Lincoln, Neb.

### Score By Quarters

<b>Colorado</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>—</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Nebraska</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>—</b>	<b>34</b>

### Team Stats

	<b>CU</b>	<b>NU</b>
First Downs	28	23
Rushing	12	15
Passing	14	7
Penalty	2	1
Rushing Attempts	43	48
Yards Gained Rushing	210	318
Yards Lost Rushing	13	22
Net Yards Rushing	197	296
Net Yards Passing	254	139
Passes Attempted	41	17
Passes Completed	25	11
Had Intercepted	2	0
Total Plays	84	65
Total Net Yards	451	435
Avg. Gain Per Play	5.4	6.7
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	4-3
Penalties-Yards	3-25	5-51
Punts-Yards	2-68	3-93
Avg. Per Punt	34.0	31.0
Punt Returns-Yards	3-46	2-(-6)
Interceptions-Yards	0-0	2-39
Fumble Returns-Yards	1-8	0-0
Kickoff Returns-Yards	4-93	5-110
Possession Time	34:20	25:40

### Scoring

**NU** — Carlos Polk 39-yard interception return (Josh Brown kick)  
**NU** — Eric Crouch 27-yard run (Brown kick)  
**CU** — Mark Mariscal 32-yard field goal  
**CU** — Cortlen Johnson 39-yard run (Mariscal kick)  
**CU** — Johnson 2-yard run (Mariscal kick)  
**NU** — Crouch 2-yard run (Brown kick)  
**CU** — Johnson 1-yard run (Mariscal kick)  
**NU** — Brown 20-yard field goal  
**NU** — Crouch 26-yard run (Brown kick)  
**KSU** — John Minardi 15-yard pass from Craig Ochs (Mariscal kick)  
**NU** — Brown 29-yard field goal  
**Att.** — 77,672  
**Temp.** — 31



Senior I-back Correll Buckhalter carried just six times, but finished with 68 yards, for an average of 11.3 yards per carry.

### SEASON STATS

#### RUSHING LEADERS

Name	G	Att.	Yds.	YPG	TD
Alexander, D.	11	182	1,154	104.9	8
Crouch, E.	11	169	971	88.3	20
Buckhalter, C.	11	106	750	68.2	7
Miller, W.	11	45	225	20.5	2
Diedrick, D.	11	33	212	19.3	3
Davies, J.	11	18	183	16.6	1
Lord, J.	6	28	130	21.7	4
Collins, T.	4	13	77	19.3	0
Grixby, D.	11	10	61	5.5	0
Kastl, P.	6	6	26	4.3	0
Miller, R.	4	5	23	5.8	0
Newcombe, B.	11	9	18	1.6	0

#### PASSING

Name	G	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Crouch, E.	11	75-156-7	48.1	1,101	11
Lord, J.	6	9-16-1	56.3	116	0

#### RECEIVING LEADERS

Name	G	No.	Yds.	YPC	YPG	TD
Davison, M.	11	21	389	18.5	35.4	3
Wistrom, T.	11	19	314	16.5	28.5	5
Newcombe, B.	11	19	249	13.1	22.6	0
Gibson, J.	11	8	41	5.1	3.7	1
Buckhalter, C.	11	5	85	17.0	7.7	1
Bowling, J.	11	4	46	11.5	4.2	1
Davies, J.	11	3	49	16.3	4.5	0
Alexander, D.	11	2	17	8.5	1.5	0

#### FIELD GOALS

Name	G	Att.	Good	Long
Brown, J.	11	10	5	40

#### PUNTING

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Hadenfeldt, D.	39	1,708	43.8	62
Brown, J.	1	28	28.0	28

#### DEFENSIVE LEADERS

Name	G	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	S/Yds.
Polk, C.	11	40	46	86	8-27	1-39	1-10
Stella, R.	10	36	22	58	15-40	0	5.5-29
Shanley, S.	11	30	24	54	4-7	1-18	1-4
Vanden Bosch, K.	11	31	23	54	17-67	0	6-38
Craver, K.	11	32	21	53	6-23	0	2.5-19
Lohr, J.	11	19	23	42	6-13	0	2-10
Walker, J.	11	23	15	41	2-2	2-24	0
Booker, D.	11	18	16	34	2-10	5-64	0
Kelsay, C.	11	9	19	28	2-5	0	0.5-4
Watchorn, T.	11	11	15	26	2-3	0	0.5-4
Groce, D.	11	20	6	26	1-6	1-0	0
Kaiser, L.	8	8	16	24	0	1-13	0
Slechta, J.	11	9	15	24	3-12	1-10	1-7

#### TEAM STATISTICS

Total Offensive Yards	5,059	3,542				
Plays	808	738				
Average Per Play	6.3	4.8				
Average Per Game	459.9	322.0				
Net Rushing Yards	3,842	1,251				
Attempts	636	345				
TDs Rushing	45	12				
Net Passing Yards	1,217	2,291				
Completions	84	179				
Average Per Pass	7.1	5.8				
Average Per Catch	14.5	12.8				
Average Per Game	110.6	208.3				
TDs Passing	11	10				
Sacks By-Yards	22-127	10-75				
Fumbles-Lost	25-9	14-5				
Penalties-Yards	71-622	83-654				
<b>Scoring</b>	<b>1st</b>	<b>2nd</b>	<b>3rd</b>	<b>4th</b>	<b>OT</b>	<b>TOT</b>
NU	150	111	78	111	6	456
Opponents	34	74	53	49	3	213

### Individual Leaders

#### COLORADO

##### RUSHING

Name	Att.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Johnson, C.	26	155	6.0	39	3
Purify, B.	9	28	3.1	8	0
Ochs, C.	7	14	2.0	11	0
Drumm, B.	1	0	0.0	0	0

##### PASSING

Name	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Ochs, C.	25-41-2	61.0	254	1

##### RECEIVING

Name	No.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Minardi, J.	6	85	14.2	26	1
Green, J.	5	57	11.4	19	0
McCready, E.	4	42	10.5	16	0
Graham, D.	4	29	7.3	14	0
Johnson, C.	1	6	6.0	6	0
Cormier, C.	1	5	5.0	5	0
Nemeth, S.	1	3	3.0	3	0

##### PUNTING

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Flores, J.	2	68	34.0	36

##### PUNT RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Brunson, J.	1	17	17.0	17	0
Minardi, J.	1	15	15.0	15	0
Lewis, M.	1	14	14.0	14	0

##### KICKOFF RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Cormier, C.	2	41	20.5	21	0
Brunson, M.	1	30	30.0	30	0
Hollowell, R.	1	22	22.0	22	0

##### DEFENSIVE LEADERS

Name	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	Sacks
Sykes, J.	5	6	11	0	0	0
Lewis, M.	4	7	11	2-2	0	0
Robinson, R.	5	3	8	0	0	0
Strickland, D.	5	1	6	0	0	0
Killion, A.	3	2	5	1-1	0	0
Jones, A.	0	5	5	0	0	0
Bannan, J.	4	0	4	0	0	0
Peake, A.	2	2	4	0	0	0
Jackson, P.	2	2	4	0	0	0
McCoy, D.	2	1	3	0	0	0
McDonnell, B.	0	3	3	0	0	0
Mossoni, K.	2	0	2	1-3	0	0
Wahlroos, D.	2	0	2	0	0	0
Brayton, T.	2	0	2	1-2	0	0
Taulealea, S.	1	1	2	0	0	0

#### NEBRASKA

##### RUSHING

Name	Att.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Crouch, E.	20	125	6.3	32	3
Alexander, D.	16	98	6.1	42	0
Buckhalter, C.	6	68	11.3	23	0
Miller, W.	4	6	1.5	3	0
Davies, J.	1	-1	-1.0	0	0

##### PASSING

Name	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Crouch, E.	11-17-0	64.7	139	0

##### RECEIVING

Name	No.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Davison, M.	3	34	11.3	15	0
Gibson, J.	3	20	6.7	9	0
Newcombe, B.	2	30	15.0	17	0
Wistrom, T.	1	25	25.0	25	0
Buckhalter, C.	1	22	22.0	22	0
Bowling, J.	1	8	8.0	8	0

##### PUNTING

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Hadenfeldt, D.	2	93	46.5	51
Team	1	0	0.0	0

##### PUNT RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Team	1	-2	-2.0	0	0
Walker, J.	1	-4	-4.0	0	0

##### KICKOFF RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Walker, J.	3	73	24.3	25	0
Stella, R.	1	25	25.0	25	0
Diedrick, D.	1	12	12.0	12	0

##### DEFENSIVE LEADERS

Name	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	Sacks
Vanden Bosch, K.	7	1	8	3-3	0	0
Finley, C.	7	1	8	0	0	0
Shanley, S.	6	2	8	0	0	0
Lohr, J.	5	2	7	2-3	0	0
Stella, R.	5	2	7	1-2	0	0
Walker, J.	4	3	7	0	0	0
Craver, K.	4	1	5	0	0	0
Polk, C.	3	2	5	0	1-39	0
Watchorn, T.	2	2	4	0	0	0
Kelsay, C.	2	2	4	0	0	0
Groce, D.	2	1	3	0	0	0
Burrow, J.	2	0	2	1-6	0	1-6
Grixby, D.	2	0	2	0	0	0
Vedral, M.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Kaiser, L.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Adams, D.	0	2	2	0	0	0
Swiney, E.	1	0	1	0	1-0	0





## Valentine's Bahamas Cruise

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# Gaining Respect

***Morock, Huskers  
thought they  
should have  
beaten powerful  
Southern Cal***

**By Mike Babcock**

**T**he moment is preserved in a photograph originally published in a Lincoln newspaper on the day after Nebraska's 21-21 tie at Southern California in 1970. Dave Morock has a print of the photo.

"I had a look on my face that scared me," he said recently.

He is turned slightly to his left, staring at the camera, arms at his side.

The cutline says simply: "POST-GAME EMOTION . . . NU's Dave Morock."

As the senior monster back left the field at the Coliseum, one of the many Cornhusker fans who had followed the team to Los Angeles said, by way of consolation, "nice game."

"That wasn't a nice game," Morock responded. "It sucked."

Somewhere in that sequence, the shutter of a camera clicked.

Morock appreciated the fan's sentiment, of course. Even then, Nebraska enjoyed great support, on the road as well as at Memorial Stadium. "The fans were phenomenal to us," he said.

But his response reflected a feeling he and his Cornhusker teammates shared.

Even though USC had been the higher ranked team and as such the favorite to win the game, "we should have won," said Morock. "I think we gained national respect at that point."

And, really, Nebraska hasn't relinquished that respect since then.

A few years later, Morock was playing in a charity basketball game with other former Cornhusker football players, when a spectator came up to him and said, "You guys created a monster."

"And that's really what happened," he said.





# The First

11th in a Series

# 1

Thirty years have passed since Nebraska won its first official national title. And during those 30 years, Nebraska has finished atop the national rankings four more times, including three from 1994 to 1997. As the 1970 season illustrates, championships can depend on luck as well as on preparation and design. In a 12-part series, Huskers Illustrated takes a game-by-game look at the 1970 season.

Those associated with Coach Bob Devaney's ninth Nebraska team in 1970 agree. The Southern California tie was a springboard to the Cornhuskers' first national championship. And the program would never be quite the same. "We started raising expectations," Morock said.

His expectations were high, though certainly not national championship high, when he arrived from Clairton, Pa., in the fall of 1967. Many times over the years he has been asked how he managed to get from western Pennsylvania to Nebraska. But he wasn't the team's only Pennsylvanian.

The Cornhuskers recruited heavily in western Pennsylvania under Devaney. Assistant coach John Melton was from the area — he attended high school in Burgettstown, Pa. — and regularly visited in search of players. In 1967, the varsity roster included 11 Pennsylvanians, among them Dennis Richnafsky, Barry Alvarez, Frank Patrick, Frank Avolio, Frank Vactor, Bob Liggett and Tony Dvorsak.

Morock was among five Pennsylvanians who lettered in 1970.

As a senior in 1970, monster back Dave Morock had four interceptions, including one which he returned for a touchdown against Kansas State.

## Game 11

**Nebraska 28, Oklahoma 21**

Nov. 21, 1970

Memorial Stadium

	Score	Time
<b>(Second Quarter)</b>		
<b>OU</b> — Jack Mildren, 6-yd run (Bruce Derr kick)	0-7	10:02
<b>NU</b> — Johnny Rodgers, 53-yd pass from Jerry Tagge (Paul Rogers kick)	7-7	8:30
<b>OU</b> — Joe Wylie, 37-yd run (Derr kick)	7-14	6:30
<b>NU</b> — Joe Orduna, 3-yd run (Rogers kick)	14-14	1:35
<b>(Third Quarter)</b>		
<b>NU</b> — Guy Ingles, 13-yd pass from Tagge (Rogers kick)	21-14	5:54
<b>(Fourth Quarter)</b>		
<b>OU</b> — Willie Franklin, 10-yd pass from Wylie (Derr kick)	21-21	14:48
<b>NU</b> — Tagge, 1-yd run (Rogers kick)	28-21	7:42

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The others were Vactor (Washington), Bob Grenfell (Philadelphia), Tom McClelland (Turtle Creek) and Bob Pabis (Monessen).

Richnafsky, a senior split end, was from Morock's high school and served as his recruiting host. Though Virginia Tech had been persistent in recruiting him, Morock picked Nebraska. "I thought I might as well go to a program where I had an opportunity to go to a bowl game," he said.

He didn't have much say in the matter, anyway. After Devaney paid a visit to Clairton, "it wouldn't have mattered what my choice was," Morock said. "He recruited my mom."

That was one of Devaney's skills as a recruiter. He could charm the mothers of recruits.

He often joked that he once did such an effective job of recruiting a player's mom that she wanted to come to Nebraska but unfortunately her son remained determined to go elsewhere.

"He really cared about me and my family," said Morock, whose father was deceased. "He'd go out of his way to ask, 'How's Rose?' Not just, 'How's your mom?' but 'How's Rose?'"

If not for his mom, Morock might

not have been around to start on the Cornhuskers' first national championship team. He had become discouraged as a back-up to Al Larson, who was only a year ahead of him, and he considered transferring about the time he was a junior.

Larson, with whom he remains in close contact, "never made a mistake," Morock said.

A conversation with his mom quickly ended any thoughts of his leaving, however.

"My mom said, 'I don't care where you go, but you're not coming back here.' My mom was tough," he said. "She told me, 'You're not quitting anything. You're going to make the best of it.'"

"Anyone at that age, the talk is, 'I'm leaving.' But you don't have a plan. You don't think it through. Where are you going to go? Everybody goes through that, even Eric Crouch when he left for a day. Frank (Solich) going up to Omaha to talk to him or me calling my mom, it's the same thing.

"My mom was wise beyond her years. I have no regrets that I stayed."

Morock stayed and made the most of his senior season, stepping up after Larson completed his eligibility. He was a key contributor in a secondary that set the school single-season record for pass interceptions with 30.

He had four, one of which he returned for a touchdown.

The interception return for a touchdown came in a 51-13 victory against Kansas State at Memorial Stadium. The Cornhuskers intercepted seven passes by the Wildcats' Lynn Dickey that day.

The disparity between the teams wasn't as great as the score indicated, according to Morock, who many years later told Dickey that the Wildcats had been out-coached.

Monte Kiffin, who coordinated the defense, put together a great game plan.

"Monte was a genius," said Morock. "He was as fine a coach as I've ever been around."

Kiffin and the defensive coaches had another solid game plan for the 17-12 Orange Bowl victory against Louisiana State, which produced Nebraska's first national title.

Morock almost unwittingly undercut that plan during a practice before the game. He was taking a break on the sideline when an interested spectator struck up a conversation.

The atmosphere at practice was considerably more casual than it is now.

Anyway, the man asked Morock about LSU's offense. "I thought he was a Nebraska fan," Morock said.



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"So I told him, 'Hell, LSU's offense is some half-assed draw play.' "

It turned out the man was a writer for Sports Illustrated.

A version of Morock's comment was printed in the magazine, but after the game.

The next week, Morock was called to Devaney's office. Devaney was not amused. "He was holding the magazine," said Morock. "He told me, 'You've got to watch what you say.' "

But no damage had been done. And Morock's career was over anyway.

Morock taught and coached briefly after finishing at Nebraska, including a year with Cornhusker teammate Dan Schneiss at Boys Town, Neb., High School. But that was not for him, and he has been involved in agriculture-related businesses, primarily relating to ag chemicals, since then.

He and his family lived in Omaha for all but the last two-and-a-half years, and the plan is to eventually move back there. But for now, they live north of Kansas City, in Parkville, Mo.

In preparing for one of the family's moves, a friend came across the photo taken after the USC tie. Morock's face can be seen through the bars on his helmet. "It's a look of disgust," he said. ■



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# Humble Approach

## Collier emphasizing change of attitude to Ffriend, Huskers

**K**imani Ffriend was being interviewed after practice the day before Nebraska's home opener against Eastern Illinois when teammate Steffon Bradford walked by on his way to the locker room.

Bradford stopped and interrupted Ffriend's answer to a question.

"He lies," Bradford said, laughing. "Don't listen to him."

Ffriend smiled. "That wouldn't have happened last year," he said of Bradford's good-natured interruption. "That's a perfect example. It would not have happened last year."

A year ago, the relationship between Cornhusker teammates wouldn't have allowed for such playful interruptions. "We were immature," said Ffriend. "This year, I'd have to say the level we're at is way past that. We have changed a whole lot. That's chemistry. That's what we were lacking."

"I can confidently say that we've got chemistry this year. It might not look like it right now, but we have chemistry. And we have to build on that chemistry."

That it might not have looked like Nebraska had chemistry was, in part, a result of its 87-83 loss at Oral Roberts in the season opener. Ffriend didn't make the trip to Tulsa, Okla., with his teammates, listening to a radio broadcast instead because of a three-game suspension.

He and Rodney Fields also missed both preseason exhibitions because of unrelated suspensions.

Having to stay home "was pretty frustrating," said Ffriend, a consensus preseason first-team All-Big 12 center. "The team needed me, and I was not there to help them. Sitting on the bench has made me more humble, more patient. It has changed me a lot. I'm a changed person right now."

Ffriend established a reputation for volatility during his first season at Nebraska. Former Coach Danny Nee described him as "high maintenance," and the description proved accurate.

He was often at odds with his team-



Senior center Kimani Ffriend was a consensus preseason first-team All-Big 12 selection.

mates, with friction occasionally manifesting itself in scuffles during practice. Apparently such a scuffle involving teammate Cookie Belcher led to his suspension, though Coach Barry Collier has declined to identify the reasons for it.

Whatever the cause, the suspension has been "very humbling," Ffriend said.

"It opened my eyes a lot. I'm more mature now. I know what I need to do. I'm not helping my team by sitting on the bench. I need to just go in and play basketball, leave all the off-the-court stuff, all the distractions and everything, behind me, just move on."

Ffriend can do a lot to help Collier's first Nebraska team. The 6-foot-11, 220-pound senior from Kingston, Jamaica, led the conference in blocked shots last season and was among the leaders in rebounding (8.8), field goal percentage (53.7) and double-doubles (eight).

His 85 blocked shots were the third most in Cornhusker history.

He had 15 or more rebounds in four games, including a Big 12-record 21 against Oral Roberts, and scored 20 or more points five times, with a high of 23 against Kansas.

He also shot a school-record 227 free throws, evidence of how active he was around the basket.

"Kimani is a special player because he's very intense and very athletic," Collier said after practice on the day before Ffriend returned to the lineup. "He adds quite a bit out there. It makes you look like your team knows even more what it's doing because he can erase so many mistakes."

The suspension hasn't changed that part of the way Ffriend plays.

"I'm not ready to stop being an intense player because that's what gets me going," he said. "I'm very emotional. I just have to turn that emotion to the basketball court, to the other team."

Collier is looking for humility not only from Ffriend but also from the rest of the team.

"We need to be more disciplined, more humble in our approach to the game and (in) realizing what is required of us," said Collier. "I don't think we're under-confident. I think we're still overconfident. We need to take the underdog's role and accept that as where we are right now."

Counting last season and the Oral Roberts game, Nebraska had lost 20 of its last 31. "I don't know how we could possibly think we're better than somebody until we prove it," he said.

"What we're trying to do is find out where our team is, and if we're too overconfident and we're not respecting our opponents, then we need to be knocked down and put back in the right spot."

Collier's emphasis on changing the team's attitude has not been lost on Ffriend.

"He preaches to us that we need to be humble. We need to give the other team respect because he thinks that we might have a big head, that we're going into games overconfident and overlooking teams," said Ffriend. "You have to show that team respect and think the opponent is better than you."

"If you do that, you have a chance to win games. To me, it makes a lot of sense."

So does his three-game suspension, sort of.

"There are things I might disagree with, but I accept it," Ffriend said. "I can say I accept it. At the time I didn't understand. But there were reasons why I got suspended. I came to realize I was wrong for the things I did. So I move on. It's all about growing up, you know? You learn from your mistakes." And the team chemistry is better as a result. ■





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# Bigger Challenge

***Top-ranked  
Huskers hoping  
to earn their spot  
in school's rich  
volleyball history***

**By Todd Henrichs**

**W**ith such big shoes to fill, the Nebraska volleyball team could have had cold feet to begin the season.

First there was new head coach John Cook, the hand-picked successor to Terry Pettit. All Pettit did was average 30 victories over 23 seasons on the NU bench.

Then there were the players, talented athletes who Cook asked individually to take up their share of the load when Nancy Meendering decided to sit out the season as a red-shirt. Had she played, Meendering would almost certainly have won national player-of-the-year honors this season.

Outside the locker room, everyone wondered if this team could live up to the large-sized Husker traditions. The 21 conference titles. The six final four appearances. The 1995 national championship.

But inside those four walls, the big shoes came with even bigger aspirations.

"One of our missions is to do some things that are better or haven't been done in the past," said Cook, who in his first six months on the job took the team on trips to Puerto Rico and China for some intense training. "We have to continue to do that, or we're never going to earn our spot in Nebraska volleyball history."

"That's a great motivator for this group."

The Huskers finally embark on NCAA Tournament play this week



**Greichaly Cepero**



**Amber Holmquist**



**Jenny Kropp**



**Laura Pilakowski**

knowing six wins separate them from a place in history.

But even without a national championship, 2000 already has been a record setting season for Nebraska.

An all-time best crowd of 12,504

saw the Huskers defeat Colorado in October, a turnout that surprised even Nebraska officials but reinforced the bond created between a hungry team and its admiring fans.

Nebraska broke the conference



record for consecutive Big 12 victories and ran away with the championship, NU's fourth crown in five years of play within the new league. The Huskers have swept so many opponents in lopsided matches that it's big news whenever they lose a game.

When opponents can't, Nebraska's players make the challenges for themselves.

"We set individual goals as well as team goals, so each game is a challenge for us because we have set high goals that we need to achieve," sophomore Amber Holmquist said. "Winning the way we have, it may not seem like we are challenged. But we are challenged every single game."

And in every practice by coaches and teammates focused on the one goal. Nebraska's consistency is evident in offensive efficiency and defensive blocking numbers that when all is said and done might rank as the best in school history.

"If you make a mistake out there, you're expected to improve," Holmquist said. "We just hold each other accountable and hold ourselves accountable."

As a result, the road to the final four Dec. 14-16 in Richmond, Va., leads through the NU Coliseum. Nebraska earned home-court advantage with steady play that carried through from the steamy summer days of August to snowy nights at the end of the season.

By the midway point of the year, only Hawaii could match Nebraska's perfect record. Those two teams, along with Arizona, Southern California, Wisconsin and Minnesota are considered the leading national title contenders.

"I think if Nebraska wins the serve and pass against any opponent, they'll win it all," Kansas State Coach Jim McLaughlin said. "I've scouted and charted a lot of teams this year. If they win the serve and pass, they're going to score points faster than anyone."

Nebraska, however, wears the target that comes with being ranked No. 1 throughout most of the year. But that's not a concern to the Huskers.

"I don't think we'll ever be satisfied until we win the last game," said sophomore Laura Pilakowski, a candidate for All-American honors along with Holmquist and team-

mates Greichaly Cepero and Jenny Kropp.

"It doesn't matter right now if we're No. 1," Pilakowski added. "We go into practice every day knowing that we need to improve in everything to get where we want to be at the end and not be disappointed."

Cook said the only rating he looks at is the final ranking from a year ago. On the wall of his office hangs a rundown of the coaches' poll listing Nebraska an uncharacteristic 11th following last season.

A Husker team hadn't finished that low since 1983, the year after this year's class of Nebraska freshmen was born.

Nebraska is back heading in the right direction, but the postseason will determine how big a step the Huskers have made.

"If we do our job as coaches and the players embrace what they need to do, then I think the national championship is very realistic for us," Cook said. "It's on our shoulders right now."

"We know we have the talent, we have the system, we have the players, and we've proven we can beat the best teams. Now are we going to do it at showtime and are we going to be mentally and physically prepared when the time comes to perform our best?" ■



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# 'Soft' Commitments Touchy Situations

*More athletes  
continue to take  
campus visits  
after committing*

**By James Hale**

**T**here is no question that the game of recruiting has changed over the last few years.

The Nebraska coaches understand this because they have been setting the standard and changing the landscape of recruiting for the last several years. In fact,

## Nebraska Commitments for 2001

Player	Hometown (school)	Ht.	Wt.	Pos.
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Jared Helming	Springfield (Kickapoo), Mo.	6-4	270	DT
Richie Incognito	Glendale (Mountain View), Ariz.	6-4	285	OL
Mike McLaughlin	Omaha (Millard North), Neb.	6-1	175	QB
Gary Pike	Pueblo (Centennial), Colo.	6-5	275	OL
Cory Ross	Denver (Thomas Jefferson), Colo.	5-9	182	DB/WR
Barrett Ruud	Lincoln (Southeast), Neb.	6-2	220	LB
Dan Stevenson	Barrington, Ill.	6-6	305	OL
Mike Stuntz	Council Bluffs (St. Albert), Iowa	6-2	180	QB

Nebraska is the one of the founding fathers of the early commitments, recruiting from its own camps and from recruiting year around.

When the early commitment first

came into vogue, the college teams had the edge getting prep athletes to commit and easily holding onto those athletes. Many athletes would commit without even taking a visit for fear that there wouldn't be a scholarship available if they waiting until January.

However, late in the 1990s, athletes started to catch on and started to play the game along with the colleges. Athletes started to commit to one school early, only to still take visits to other colleges. Thus the term soft commitment came into vogue. No football program in the country likes a soft commitment because it forces both sides into a very touchy situation.

Is the player committed or not? Do we hold a scholarship for him, or do we still shop around and try to sign another player at his position?

These are questions that aren't easily answered, but already Nebraska has had to deal with two such situations from its early commitment list.

Cornerback Cory Ross of Denver (Jefferson), Colo., says he is still committed to Nebraska but that he wants to visit Colorado for sure. He also likes Kansas, where his brother plays, and Miami. Both those schools stand a good chance of getting visits as well.

Now, offensive lineman Dan Stevenson of Barrington, Ill., has to

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# K-State Does Its Own Thing

**K**ansas State has never recruited by the book. The Wildcats have never been a team who recruited based on the national recruiting publications. The Wildcats have always had their own recruiting board and their own recruiting list, and that list has always turned out to be as good as any.

So, it's interesting to watch what the Wildcats do early in the recruiting race, because as good as they are their recruiting it doesn't always rank up there with the big boys.

The early results are in, and the Wildcats have six commitments, with one a soft commitment at this time. Ironically all but one are from Kansas, and this is not a year that is considered a great recruiting year in the Sunflower state.

Heading the list is running back Darren Sproles of Olathe (North), Kan., who is considered one of the top 60 players in the Big 12 area, but he is only 5-foot-9, and many feel he will have to play wide receiver. Offensive lineman Ray Green of Junction City, Kan., is another top-60 pick in the Big 12 area. Place-kicker Joe Rheem of Wichita (Collegiate), Kan., may have the highest rating among the Wildcat recruits, and he is considered one of the top three kickers in the Big 12.

Running back Jessie Tatum of Topeka (Hayden), Kan., will probably play defense at Kansas State. He rushed for more than 1,600 yards as a junior but still isn't rated among the top 60 in the Big 12 area. Linebacker Matt

Butler of Manhattan, Kan., is another non rated player that the Wildcats committed early.

Defensive tackle Corey White (6-3, 280, 4.8) of Navarro (Texas) Junior College is now a soft commitment because he said the Wildcats haven't called him in three weeks.

Kansas State remains one of the top 10 programs in the country and they are doing it with recruiting classes that don't ranked in the top 25 on a yearly basis. Thus far this class can't be ranked in the top 35 and you wonder when that is going to come back and haunt the Wildcats.

— The firing of Larry Smith should give the recruiting efforts a boost, because they certainly weren't going well under his direction. Smith was never able to corral all the talent in Missouri as the top athletes always signed elsewhere. Missouri also lost their stranglehold on Illinois and had no solid area they could call their own.

Missouri had four commitments at the time of Smith's firing and there is a question whether the four will hold for the new Tiger coach. The four are solid athletes, but not what would be considered blue-chippers.

The new Tiger coach will face a tough task in the recruiting wars. He will have no solid ground to work off of and he will have to overcome consistent losing. Competing against great recruiting teams such as Nebraska, Colorado, Wisconsin and Notre Dame won't be easy for whoever the next coach is. If the Tigers want to compete even with a new head coach they must hire one with total enthusiasm and patients to overcome tremendous odds. ■

be regarded as a soft commitment, after taking a recent visit to Tennessee.

Stevenson said he just wanted to make sure he was doing the right thing.

"Hey, this is the biggest decision of my life up to this point, and I want to make sure I am making the right decision," Stevenson said. "I am still committed to Nebraska, but I am going to look at some other colleges just to make sure that I am making the right decision."

"At this point, I have to take care of myself and do what is best for me. This doesn't mean that I won't sign with Nebraska, but I am just trying to make sure that I am making the right decision."

The visit to Tennessee didn't necessarily improve the Volunteers' position with Stevenson, which is the good news. The bad news is that Stevenson is not ruling them out either.

"I had a good time at Tennessee, but I have to put my visit into perspective," Stevenson said. "You always have a good visit to every school that you visit, and you always have a good time. What I have to do

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Highly regarded offensive lineman Blake Larsen of Atlantic, Iowa, still has Nebraska high on his list.

is sit back and in a couple of days or maybe even a week see if I still have great feelings about them. They were in my top three when I committed to Nebraska, and without question they are still in my top three."

Now, for more bad news, Stevenson said he will visit both Wisconsin and Florida in December.

— Offensive lineman Blake Larsen of Atlantic, Iowa, may drive every coach recruiting him nuts before he signs on the dotted line. Larsen is regarded as the second best offensive lineman in the country.

The personable Larsen has a good time with life and admits he is having a good time in recruiting.

"There are so many good schools out there that it's hard for me to make up my mind," Larsen said. "I know what I want in a college, but what I am finding out is that many schools have what I am looking for."

"I visited OU this weekend and had a great time there. They are kind of a late entry with me because Coach Chuck Long (quarterback coach at Oklahoma) quit calling me when I had committed to Iowa, which was the right thing to do. However, now that I am not committed anywhere, they have started to call me again, and I like what I am hearing from them."

Larsen said he almost committed to Nebraska recently and still considers them his front-runner by a slight margin.

"Nebraska is a great school, but

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Oklahoma has really impressed me as of late," Larsen said. "Coach Long is a legend in Iowa, and Coach (Bob) Stoops and his brother both played at Iowa. So there are some serious Iowa ties there right now. There are still a number of people in Iowa disappointed that Coach Stoops didn't get the job at Iowa.

"I am an impressionable guy, and I am trying to take that out of the equation. I like seven schools right now, and they are Oklahoma, Nebraska, Iowa, Michigan State, Notre Dame, Miami and Tennessee. The way I feel right now, both Oklahoma and Nebraska have a legitimate shot at signing me."

— Nebraska is very close to receiving a commitment from junior college wide receiver Clifford Brye (5-9, 175, 4.4) of Hutchinson (Kan.) Community College. In fact, Nebraska would have his commitment, if his grades were already in the books. Brye may have to attend summer school before his grades are in order, and that forces the Huskers to take a wait-and-see attitude with him.

"I wanted to commit to Nebraska, but they told me they needed to wait until they saw a progress report on my grades," Brye said. "I probably won't be able to enroll until the fall, and I can understand why that would cause them some concern. However, I know that my progress report is going to be just fine and that I will be a Cornhusker soon."

Brye started as a true freshman at Wyoming, before transferring when there was a coaching change.

— Nebraska has made its way into the picture for the top running back in Iowa — Marques Simmons (5-10, 180, 4.4) of Davenport (North). Simmons rushed for 1,778 yards this season, following 1,350 as a junior and 1,100 as a sophomore.

Simmons has visit set to Wisconsin and Iowa State in December and is close to setting a visit to Nebraska.

"I am talking with Nebraska and should set up a visit with them soon," Simmons said. "Recruiting is becoming a hard situation for me because I really don't know what I want to do. I have set up a couple of visits, but I really want to visit Nebraska. I love the way Nebraska runs the football and, if you will notice, all the schools I am considering really run the football well." ■

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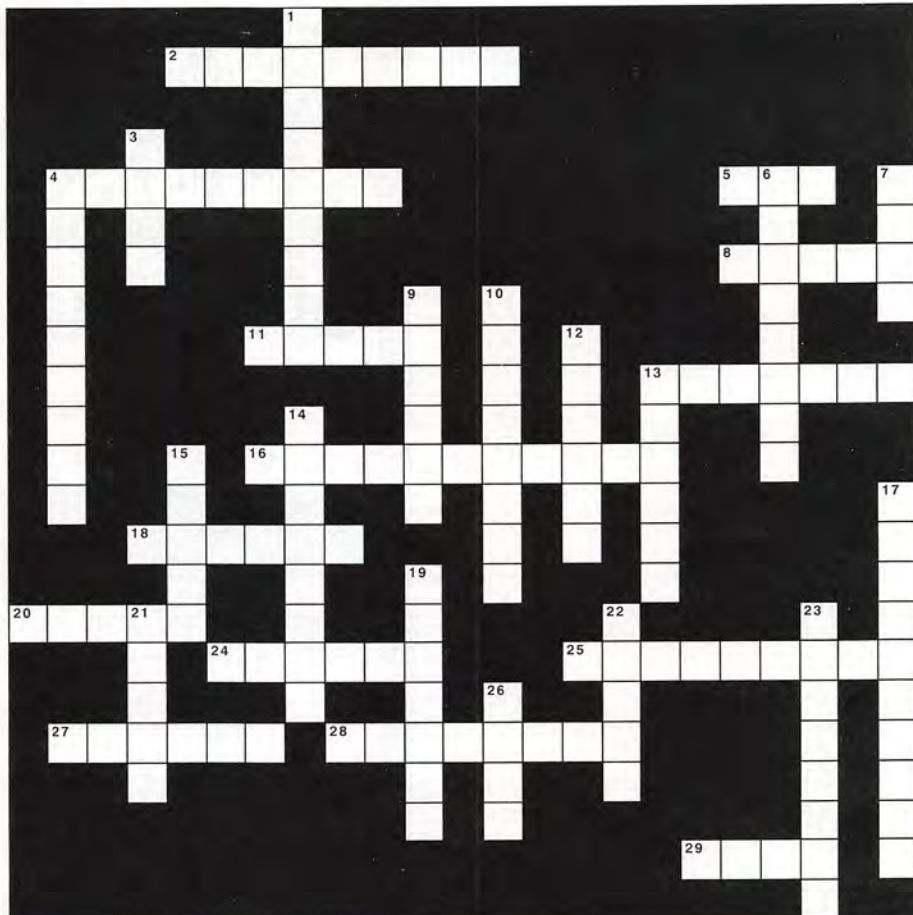
## ACROSS

- 2 NU running back coach
- 4 Next year's opener
- 5 NU pass completions vs. Kansas State
- 8 Ex-Husker safety with Bears
- 11 Ex-Husker receiver with Redskins
- 13 Ex-Husker guard with Chiefs
- 16 NU's No. 83
- 18 NU offensive coordinator
- 20 Ex-Husker I-back with Packers
- 24 NU rush end coach
- 25 NU's No. 55 (offense)
- 27 Last season's bowl game
- 28 NU deep snapper
- 29 NU's No. 13

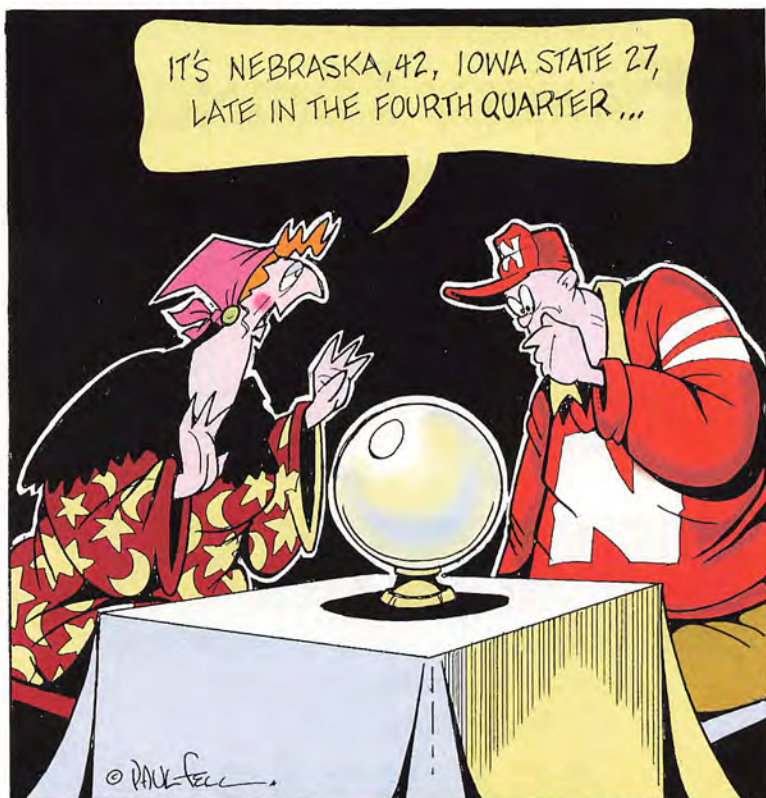
## DOWN

- 1 NU's No. 38
- 3 NU defensive coordinator
- 4 Last season's bowl opponent
- 6 Ex-Husker safety with Chiefs
- 7 NU kickoff specialist
- 9 Returned blocked punt vs. KSU
- 10 Frank Solich's college position
- 12 NU's No. 91
- 13 NU's No. 65
- 14 NU interception leader
- 15 NU place-kicker
- 17 NU holder
- 19 Ex-Husker rush end with Rams
- 21 NU strength coach
- 22 NU kicker coach
- 23 1999 Big 12 champion
- 26 NU quarterback coach

Answers in January issue



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## Under Pressure

*Winning drive provides form of redemption for kicker Brown, Crouch, Solich*



**Mike BABCOCK**

THE DRIVE will be remembered with the most dramatic in Nebraska football history: seven plays, 47 yards to set up Josh Brown's 29-yard field goal as the final seconds ticked off.

About the only thing Nebraska's drive to a 34-32 victory against Colorado lacked, really, was significance beyond itself. It didn't keep national title hopes alive, the way the final drive in regulation at Missouri in 1997 did. But it will hold up on its own merits with the passing of time.

In a more immediate context, the 47-second sequence of events at the end of the Cornhuskers' ninth victory provided a form of redemption not only for Brown, who had struggled with his field-goal kicking this season, but also for quarterback Eric Crouch and head coach Frank Solich.

Crouch, who was coming off a 2-for-13 passing performance against Kansas State that had some questioning his throwing ability, completed 5-of-6 to set up Brown's field goal.

And Solich showed his critics that he could call successful plays under pressure.

When asked if he felt vindicated, however, he responded in characteristic fashion.

"No," he said. "I don't feel badly sometimes when a play doesn't go well. And I don't jump up and down when a play goes well because I think I understand a little bit how it works."

Actually, he was jumping up and down along with just about everyone else on the Cornhusker sideline after Brown's kick split the uprights at the south end of Memorial Stadium.

But Solich was jumping not because of the plays but rather because of their result. Beyond that, "this doesn't do anything for me as far as whether I call plays good or bad," he said.

His play calling was a subject of much discussion before the Colorado game. Some suggested he give up his duties as offensive coordinator. An irrational few demanded his dismissal.

But "I think I give us, for the most part, our best chance (offensively)," Solich said in answer to a reporter's question the week after Nebraska's 29-28 loss at Kansas State.

"Certainly everybody in our system understands our offense. We work together in building a game plan. Everybody is giving suggestions in terms of plays. So it's a combined effort.

"That's not any different than what it was when Tom (Osborne) was here. I have the final say in the selection of plays, but you try to build in a number of things in selecting those plays, and one of them is how your assistants feel about particular plays that they're throwing your way also."

Solich's play calling against Colorado probably would have been questioned if not for that final Crouch-directed drive. It might be anyway, even though it was productive.

The Cornhuskers finished with 435 total yards, including 296 rushing. They averaged 6.7 yards per play and 6.2 yards per carry. The problem was, they ran only 65 plays.

Colorado had the ball nearly nine minutes more and ran 19 more plays.

The majority of Nebraska's plays were runs, of course.

"The thing that we have not changed, that I feel very good about, is that philosophically we've gone into every game with the idea of running the football," Solich said. "Now if you're jumping around with your philosophy, I can understand maybe people saying, 'Well, what's going on?'"

"But I think we've held pretty fast and true to what our philosophy has been.

"We have not jumped ship at the drop of a hat. We've really tried to find ways within what we believe is our best way of putting points on the board and moving the ball to get it done."

With less than a minute remaining in the Colorado game, the only way to get it done was by passing, something that

appeared to have deserted the Cornhuskers in the Kansas State loss. Solich acknowledged that Nebraska had fallen off in the passing game "in the latter part of the season."

But there was no drop-off against Colorado.

"I've always had confidence in my arm," Crouch said afterward. "I think a lot of people maybe have doubted that a lot. But I've never doubted it before. I know how I am in practice.

"I know how I am when we're in close situations in games.

"Sometimes you're going to have games where you don't complete the percentage you'd like to be able to come back in a game like this, in a situation that was clutch."

Crouch was "in command of our offense out there, from receiving the signals to signaling everybody what was going to be called," said Solich. "There wasn't a guy that lost his composure, that was rattled, that didn't believe we had a chance to win that football game.

"Those are the kind of players you want to coach."

Whether or not an offensive coordinator is successful depends on players, and vice versa. Calling plays is much more complicated than armchair quarterbacks would have us believe.

"I understand where it's coming from," Solich said of the criticism. "You always feel that you probably put in more work than almost anybody that's second-guessing you.

"The guys that don't do the homework, that haven't seen these guys that you're playing on film, one bit, wouldn't know in any way, shape or form what people are doing defensively or offensively on the field, much less what they've done in past games. Really, what they don't know is why you call a play. There's usually some reasoning behind it. There's some rhyme or reason to what you're doing."

That should have been apparent in the final drive against Colorado. ■



**Frank Solich says he understands where the criticism is coming from.**





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